

Discipline en legende : de identiteit van de sociologie in Duitsland en de Verenigde Staten 1870-1930

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SUMMARY

Traditional research on the history of sociology is characterized by a finalistic approach. Society is commonly presented as something like a natural phenomenon that had remained undiscovered until the nineteenth century. Moreover, this approach gives the impression that once certain intellectual and social requirements had been met, the discovery of society more or less automatically led to the development of a separate discipline. Chapter I challenges this traditional account of the development of sociology. By considering a few examples it is argued that a finalistic view, particularly if based on a jigsaw- or pigeonhole-model of disciplines, does not question the *identity* of a discipline, but rather takes it for granted. Within this framework there is no room for problems as to how sociology acquired its features and the ways in which it changed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Again, certain elements of the view in question will lead to the present-day historian's presupposing a notion of historical *continuity* instead of questioning it. Thirdly, whoever does not make an issue of the identity and continuity of a discipline, will always assume its *legitimate* position as a scientific discipline without looking into the ways the members of this discipline came to acquire their legitimate position within certain fields. Finally, by ignoring the question as to how sociology managed to secure its legitimate position on the academic scene, one will leave aside the question as to the ways in which it aimed for cultural *authority* among other disciplines. These four problems traditional research on the origins of sociology has passed over are the main focus of the present work. At the same time, the present study on the identity of early American and German sociology is an enquiry into the continuity, legitimate position and authority connected with its history and status.

The finalistic approach to history not only ignores a number of disciplinary problems, but also helps to form disciplinary *legends*. For example, we have been led to believe that the first sociologists entered an empty stage, as if they were the first to ever make society the object of scientific enquiry. Chapter II corrects this view and discusses two forms of pre-disciplinary social science practised during the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States. In addition it presents a non-finalistic interpretation of the decline of pre-disciplinary scientific practices, explaining it instead as a period of transition indicating the development of new *conventions* regarding scientific forms of explanation.

Chapter III deals with the establishment and demarcation of sociology as an academic discipline in the United States. It focuses on three aspects of this development, *viz.* the ways in which sociologists, by establishing boundaries, created not only a social, but also a cognitive field of enquiry, the vocabulary they produced in their attempts to construe a sociological reality, and the social practices the new discipline became associated with. The first American sociologists present sociology as a separate science but do not

consider it a specialism. Their views on the position of sociology are completely in line with their vocabulary that suggests a progressive evolutionary development, and have a cultural-political meaning. In their battles against scientific as well as social desintegration sociologists attempt to bring public opinion to a higher level.

In the United States the establishment of sociology had nothing to do with pleas for keeping science value-free. In Germany, on the other hand, the so-called debate concerning the value-free nature of science had its impact on the demarcation of sociology. The non-finalistic reconstruction of this debate in chapter IV enables one to see how the pleas for keeping science value-free amounted to a methodological strategy to separate the practice of social sciences from the older political sciences. Other than in the United States, the demarcation of sociology in Germany was less a matter of establishing a new discipline.

In the period after the first World War the practice of sociology in Germany and the United States begin to show certain similarities. In Germany, too, sociology is gradually transformed into a discipline. Moreover, like early American sociology, German sociology acquires a cultural-political significance. Nevertheless, important differences remain. Chapter V pays special attention to one of the main differences between the two traditions. While in the United States sociology is based on one vocabulary only, German sociologists use different linguistic styles to present their arguments. All the same, in the Republic of Weimar sociology does succeed in acquiring its own identity as a discipline, an identity that consists not in the sharing of one vocabulary, but of one practice. Almost all sociologists were active in the field of public education.

The previous chapters primarily focus on the way in which sociology became an established discipline. In chapter VI it is illustrated that the development of a discipline can also be reconstructed in a non-finalistic manner. If one considers what happened in the United States, it appears that the changes that took place in sociology in the period between 1905 and 1935 are not connected with any teleological process. Rather they should be characterized as a selective process of variation. For theoretical as well as practical reasons, the vocabulary suggesting a progressive evolutionary development is adjusted in various ways. The fact that American sociology breaks up into diverse schools and scientific communities does not, however, mean that it thereby loses its disciplinary identity. In the stories they relate to each other sociologists continue to *present* sociology as a collective and purposeful enterprise.

The history of science carried out in the present work is based on a number of methodological and philosophical assumptions that are discussed and assessed in the final chapter. In addition ideas are presented for a theoretical framework of the history of disciplines. Whoever intends to answer the problems brought up in the first chapter concerning the formation of disciplines should concentrate on the ways in which the members of the discipline in question establish the boundaries of their discipline (*demarcation*), the *vocabularies* they use and the (social) *practices* they focus on.