

The Emergence of Sociology from Political Economy in the US:
1880 to 1950

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Abstract

The task of this paper is to both describe and explain the evolving relations between sociology and economics in the US. The first generation of American sociology was immersed in economic questions, and its establishment in the university system was largely sponsored by economics. After the formation of the American Sociological Society, relations came to be more characterized by professionally autonomous collaboration. Joint professional gatherings of economists and sociologists – including regular joint presidential addresses – were the norm until the early 1940s. The era of collaboration ended in disciplinarily rivalry between sociologists and institutional economists, with the sociologists (notably Talcott Parsons) claiming the institutions of capitalism as the proper subject matter of sociology. This conflict fed into the ultimate failure of institutional economics and encouraged the retreat of the discipline into the technical study of prices. At the same time, sociologists never went on to seriously occupy the field of economic institutions; rather, it became a vacant lot between the disciplines, abandoned in the post-war disengagement of economics and sociology.

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1. INTRODUCTION: THE SYSTEM OF ACADEMIC PROFESSIONS

Sociology, like its colleagues and rivals in the university system, is not merely a literature but also a profession. This fact can be said to account for its existence and its future. A literature without a profession – in the sense of a career track for those who contribute to the literature and communicate its contents to younger generations – holds little prospect for advancement.

Jurisdictional claims and inter-professional competition, it has been argued, are the fundamentals of professional life. Andrew Abbott (1988), with a sweeping historical foundation, recounts the competition between psychotherapeutic professions and the clergy for the guidance of the distressed, the rivalry between lawyers and accountants over the market for business services, the disputes between psychiatry and law over treatment of the “insane”. Medicine, the icon of the professional world, engaged in territorial skirmishes with virtually every member of the modern medical “community”: pharmacists, physiotherapists, chiropractors, midwives, et al. Professions make exclusive claims to jurisdictional territory. Changes in the scope or breadth of any one profession are either encroachments on the claims of others or vacancies that other professional groups might fill. Professions, in this view, “are never seen alone... They exist in a system” (Abbott 1988:33).

At its inception, the jurisdictional mandate of sociology was to provide a framework to interpret and understand the vast socio-economic changes brought on by the industrial revolution. This central theme – the nature of industrial capitalism – runs through all the classical works: Spencer, Marx, Durkheim and Weber. This orientation placed the discipline in close contact with economics.

Sociology entered the curriculum of the expanding American universities through the departments of economics. Indeed, professional sociology in the US – its entrance into the university world and its formation as a professional body – was a thing sponsored by economics. The American Economic Association (AEA) was the early meeting place of aspiring sociologists. It was in the company of broad-minded economists that sociological networks were formed, ideas circulated, and momentum established. For many sociologists, prominence at the AEA translated into academic appointments at prestigious universities. The AEA's annual meeting was the birthplace of the American Sociological Society¹, and for more than three decades the associations coordinated their annual meetings, held joint presidential addresses, and collaborated on the socio-economic problems of the day. This close relationship between the professions of economics and sociology, however, did not continue beyond the end of World War II. At that point close communication and collaboration between the disciplines came to a rather sudden halt.

This thesis seeks to examine, describe, and explain the changing relationship between economics and sociology. This relationship passed through three phases: sponsorship, collaboration, and disengagement. The basis for these changes in the relationship between the disciplines will also be discussed. The case examined here suggests that the usual notion of disciplinary rivalry as outlined by Abbot needs to be recast into a richer and more complex picture of disciplinary development.

¹ The American Sociological Society is better known today as the American Sociological Association. The name change occurred in 1959.

2. THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY

American sociology was the product of an expanding, resource rich, academic world. In the late 19th century, the US began a transition from a collection of small, intellectually backward, religious colleges to a system of large-scale research universities, assertive of their academic freedom, and world leaders in graduate education. As late as 1890, American writers had contributed virtually nothing in the social sciences; the US imported its social-scientific knowledge and sent its best students abroad to acquire it. By the end of WWII, American traditions in both economics and sociology held unrivaled dominance in the world. From the backwaters, a massive infrastructure of knowledge was built, and the production of theory and research occurred at a tremendous rate. It was a sort of industrialization of intellectual work.

The sociology that was incorporated during this process had two basic sources: Spencerian sociology and German historical economics. The former was constructed on a foundation of classical economics, while the latter sought to rebuild economics around historical institutionalism. Both intellectual roots placed sociology in an intimate, though albeit ill-defined, relationship with economics.

2.1 SOCIETY AS A MARKETPLACE: SPENCER'S EVOLUTIONARY SOCIOLOGY

Herbert Spencer's sociology was formulated in close contact with classical political economy. He spent five years as an editor at the *Economist* magazine, and was heavily influenced by Adam Smith and Thomas Robert Malthus (Coser 1971:104). Indeed, his sociology is a grand generalization of the marketplace – competition and the division of labour.

Adam Smith emphasized that “the division of labour is limited by the extent of the market” (Smith 1993 [1776]:26). A larger market allows for larger factories that allow for greater specialization of tasks. Smith’s illustration was an 18th century urban pin-making factory. Here, we find that ten men could each devote their whole labour to a different aspect of the pin-making process. Between them, they produced some 48,000 pins in a day. In contrast, in a small market that did not permit an extensive division of labour, each man by himself makes the ‘whole pin,’ and might at best produce 20 pins in a day (Smith 1993 [1776]:12-13).

For Spencer, Smith’s account of pin-making captured the essence of human society. In Spencer’s evolutionary sociology, the expansion of population permits an increasingly extensive division of labour in society – complexity and differentiation in both individuals and social institutions (Spencer 1967).

While Spencer generally employed more vivid analogies from biology, what he really had in mind was the marketplace. Spencer noted, as Darwin himself acknowledged², that evolutionary biology had borrowed heavily from economics. “The division of labour, first dwelt on by political economists... [was] thereupon recognized by biologists” (Spencer 1967:5). But whether the metaphor is a pin factory, or the organs of a human body, Spencer’s focus was on interdependence. Social institutions – work, family, market, and religion – were to be understood as an interrelated whole. The sociological could not be surgically separated from the economic.

If mutual dependence – the functional division of labour – was the first principle of Spencer’s sociology, competition – the “survival of the fittest” – was

the second (and perhaps more memorable) principle. In this respect, Thomas Malthus' population economics was the seed for Spencer's *laissez faire* world view. Malthus focused on how demographics – especially fertility rates – responded to economic incentives. Aid to the poor, furnishing a subsistence level the market would not permit, sponsored the fertility of the poorest classes. The ultimate effect, Malthus argued, was more children, more poverty, and more misery (Malthus 1826).

Spencer pressed the implications only a little further. Income redistribution only “encourages the multiplication of the reckless and incompetent by offering them an unfailing provision, and discourages the multiplication of the competent and provident by heightening the difficulty of maintaining a family” (Spencer 1851:151). One should not be surprised to find, as a result, the deterioration of the human stock.

Spencer was the economist writ large; out of Smith and Malthus was built an enormous, innovative, and often shocking, view of society. It was, by any account, a stunning creation, and his audience was massive. “During the last quarter of the [19th] century [Spencer] enjoyed an international reputation and influence almost comparable to that of Charles Darwin” (Coser 1971:106). And his influence was particularly strong in the US.

To the numerous advocates of *laissez faire* in America, Spencer contributed both the great prestige of his name and an almost inexhaustible supply of arguments against the general-welfare state. No authority was more often cited by the opponents of state action than Herbert Spencer. (Fine 1956:43)

² Charles Darwin credited classical economics for the guiding logic of his theory of natural selection. After reading Malthus, he wrote, “I had at last got a theory by which to work” (quoted in Schweber 1978:322). Prior to his encounters with political economy, he had mostly been preoccupied with the *selective breeding* of plants and animals.

For at least several decades, sociology was widely defined by the writings of Herbert Spencer. It was a sociology that spoke forcefully about the evolution from agrarian to industrial society, weighed belligerently into public policy, and denied a simple distinction between the economic and the sociological. Even at the American Economic Association, critics of *laissez faire* often framed their work as attacks upon Spencer (e.g., Adams 1887). It was, in the end, a sociology in close contact with economics. Indeed, Spencer's framework was sometimes criticized for being too much a theory of "economic aggregates" that lacked a genuine sociological perspective (Patten 1894c).

2.2 SOCIETY AS INSTITUTIONAL HISTORY: GERMAN HISTORICAL ECONOMICS

The second intellectual root of American sociology is the German historical school of economics, from which Max Weber descended, and within which many American students were trained. For most of the 19th century, advanced education in the US was non-existent. Most schools were small religious colleges with few resources and even less sense of serious academic inquiry. Social science was ill-regarded at best. Even as late as 1875, training in political economy basically amounted to reading "one good book" (Parrish 1967:2-3). Sociology was even less developed.

Germany, in contrast, offered one of the best university systems in the world, as well as a highly prestigious collection of political economists³. It became a haven for ambitious American students. Because academic credits were fully transferable, students could study with the best professors at Berlin, Halle, and Heidelberg in the same year. Library resources were five to ten times

³ Most notable members were Gustav Schmoller, Adolph Wagner, Karl Knies, and Wilhelm Roscher. Parrish estimates that "probably about two-thirds of the annual output of literature in this subject was in the German language" (1967: 4-5).

the scale of the best American collections. Class sizes were small, and the top German minds gave much attention to their American students, welcoming them into their homes and encouraging their economic studies (Parrish 1967:3-5). The academic flood into Germany was so great that few of the founding generation of American social scientists missed the experience.

German economics was altogether different from the British classical tradition. The German school insisted on an inductive framework – grounded theory – built on the historical study of economic institutions. It was “a theory of political economy upon a basis of historical sociology” (Hasbach 1891:509). The leading works furnished rich histories of entrepreneurship, trade unions, and industrialization. They emphasized the cultural and religious groundings of economic life, and that cultural history was deeply entangled with economic history. “Economic life had to be understood... by interpreting it as part of a particular cultural pattern of a society” (Munch 1994:160).

Indeed, the broad emphasis on culture was one of the tools that German thinkers employed to differentiate themselves and their work from the classical economics. Gustav von Schmoller – who was for decades the effective spokesperson for the German school – saw Adam Smith as “the Messenger of Calvinism” ([1913] 1990:130). Smith’s “doctrinaire [market] freedom theories” were cast as archaic and rejected almost out of hand: “competition bore good fruits,” Schmoller countered, “as long as all the individuals were pious Puritans” (ibid:139)⁴.

⁴ In spite of this critique, Schmoller held much respect for Adam Smith. Political economy, in Schmoller’s view, fell from grace as soon as it lost the “psychological, moral philosophical, and sociological” insights that permeated Smith’s work. David Ricardo, with his fascination with arithmetic illustrations, was seen as the key villain: “there has seldom been... a science so damaged by one man” ([1913] 1990:140).

The Germans' political opposition to *laissez faire* capitalism was the second, or perhaps the first, feature that distinguished them from British classical tradition. Their critical inquiries into the capitalist system brought them the title "socialists of the chair". However, they were more reformists than revolutionaries. The research sponsored by their professional association, the *Verein für Sozialpolitik* (Union for Social Policy), played a key role in the development of the social welfare system pioneered by Germany in the late 1800s⁵.

Their program was, by all accounts, enormously influential for American students. Simon Patten, a key American figure in both economics and sociology, commented that "like other returning students, I thought the last word on all subjects was in German" (Patten 1912:1). While the migration to German universities only lasted for a generation, much of the spirit of the school was passed along to the younger "institutional economics" movement. Indeed, though the students of those trained in Germany, the philosophy of historical institutionalism remained a major force in American economics into the late 1930s.⁶

3. THE BEGINNINGS OF AMERICAN SOCIOLOGY: 1880-1900

By the beginning of the 1890s, there was a growing literature with a (albeit ill-defined) "sociological" viewpoint. However, there was little indication that sociology was emerging as a distinct profession. Both the Spencerian and German-historical sociologies were extensions of the inquiry into economic life.

⁵ Germany introduced a workers' compensation program in 1884 – the first such legislation in the world, which was the beginnings of the modern social welfare state.

⁶ German historical economics in the US might be considered early institutional economics. Alternatively, the institutionalist movement could be described as the second generation of the historical school, mixed with the influence of Thorstein Veblen.

Spencer's sociology – as a literal application of the market metaphor – did not require that sociologists have fundamentally different training than economists. And the German tradition in economics justified itself in part by its broad sociological foundation. At the American Economic Association, founded in 1885, there was a widespread view that “a new economic world needs a new economics” (Ely 1936:147). Sociology was welcomed at the AEA as a part of – or at least a contributor to – the reshaping of American economic thought.

3.1 THE FORMATION OF THE AMERICAN ECONOMIC ASSOCIATION

In the early 1880s, German-trained economists Richard Ely, Edmund James, and Simon Patten began plotting a professional association along the lines of the German *Verein für Sozialpolitik*. The young economists migrating back from Germany struggled for academic and public recognition. Their elders, steeped in “a rather extreme form” of the laissez-faire classical tradition, saw them as “a menace to the welfare of the country” (Ely 1937:143). That, at least, was how it seemed to them, and an association of the young progressives excited much hope.

Eventually, two different organizational models were proposed. Patten and James outlined a “Society for the Study of National Economy,” with a mandate to “combat” the notion that “our economic problems will solve themselves”. The program of the society also advocated a host of specific policies, such as monopoly regulation, environmental protections, improvements in the wages and hours of workers, and opportunities for “mental and moral growth” (Ely 1910:50-53).

Richard Ely's proposal, the “American Economic Association,” was more reserved. It simply stated that the “conflict of labour and capital” had brought on

a "vast number of social problems," and politely dismissed free market doctrine. The AEA's platform also rejected "speculation" and endless deductive reasoning in favor of the "historical and statistical study of actual conditions of economic life" (Ely 1886:6-7). "We were," Ely later reflected, "generally impressed with the sterility and barrenness of the old economics" (Ely 1910:69). At the same time, the AEA "was a protest not only against the narrow English economists but also against the current political and social ideas" (quoted in Ely 1910:80).

Richard Ely himself trained some of the central figures of early sociology. Most notable were Edward Ross and Albion Small. Ross went on to be the first head of sociology at Wisconsin, while Small was hired to organize the department of sociology at Chicago. Ely also founded a short-lived Institute for Christian Sociology (AAPSS 1893:491; AAPSS 1895:182), and later became the first president of the more enduring American Association for Labor Legislation – which regularly held joint annual meetings with the sociologists (Chasse 1991). In his *Library of Economics and Politics*, Ely published a series of important sociological works, including the famous *Hull-House Maps and Papers* (Residents of Hull-House 1895), and Edward Ross's groundbreaking work, *Social Control* (Ross 1901).

It was at the AEA where the sociology movement began to take shape: networks of practitioners were formed, papers were presented, and reputations were established. Prominent figures included Franklin Giddings, Charles Horton Cooley, Edward Ross, Lester Ward, and Albion Small. These individuals went on to establish sociology at the universities of Chicago, Columbia, Michigan, and Wisconsin among others.

The formation of academic networks through the AEA is well illustrated by Charles Horton Cooley, who first attended the annual meeting as a PhD student

in political economy at Michigan. He brought with him an interest in sociology, acquired from reading Herbert Spencer. At the 1890 AEA meeting, Cooley came into contact with Lester Ward and Franklin Giddings, who offered “kindly encouragement to [his] sociological aspirations” (Cooley 1969:5). And it was with Giddings’ active support that Cooley arranged a minor in sociology. The political economy department was open-minded and grounded in the German historical tradition; however, sociology *per se* was not available at Michigan. In an unconventional move, Cooley’s PhD examinations in the subject were conducted by correspondence. Giddings, at Columbia University, drafted the questions and marked his answers. Cooley soon began to describe his work as sociology (Cooley 1894), though some baffled over why it would not be called economics (Johnson 1895)⁷. Soon after graduation, Cooley was appointed professor of sociology in the Michigan political economy department, a position he held until his death in 1928.

Sociologists also took on some important administrative roles within the AEA, including positions as secretary, vice-president, and editor of publications. For some, such as Franklin Giddings, prominence at the AEA translated into academic appointments at leading universities.

3.2 THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

In the early 1890s, the fortunes of robber baron John D. Rockefeller were financing the construction of an unprecedented academic empire. The newly forming University of Chicago had resources and ambitions unlike any in the US. Record salaries – two to three times what other universities were offering – attracted the top thinkers and, indeed, the presidents of other schools.

⁷ Cooley’s early research is best described as economic geography (Cooley 1894).

It was here, in the context of a seemingly unlimited budget, where the first department of sociology in the world was founded.⁸ Its creation, moreover, was "half an accident" (Bannister 1987:38) – a sort of byproduct of Chicago's interest in recruiting Richard Ely's former student Albion Small.

Albion Small had studied historical economics in Germany, and completed his PhD at Johns Hopkins under Ely's direction. Before being called to Chicago, Small had taught only one course in sociology, and published nothing under that name. In fact, he was originally recommended for the chair in history. Others were deemed more qualified for the history department, but the administration, nevertheless, was enthusiastic to keep him. Small was the president of Colby College; he had symbolic value and administrative experience, and was to be appointed Dean of Liberal Arts (Bannister 1987:38; Goodspeed 1926). In the end, a department of sociology was created to find him an office.

From the beginning, there was considerable uncertainty as to what this department would look like. When Small was first assigned head of the new department, he hoped to recruit Lester Ward (the best known American sociologist of the day), Samuel Dike (a social reformer and founding member of the AEA (Ely 1910:58)), and two prominent economists: Francis Walker and Francis Wayland (Bannister 1987:38). Both of the economists were highly prestigious, but aging and certainly past their prime. Small himself later referred to them as authors of "more or less undiluted versions of the classical economics" (Small, 1916:726-27). Bannister thus comments that Small "had no clear idea of his mandate" (1987:38).

⁸ In France, Emile Durkheim became the first professor of sociology in 1887, and soon after established a journal, *Annee Sociologique*. However, rather than an institutionalized department, the project was built around Durkheim himself. And "when Durkheim passed from the scene... French sociology as the study of modern society practically disappeared for more than a quarter century" (Shils 1970:767).

If his mandate was unclear, Small did at least seem to have an agenda: a joint department of sociology and economics. Small and Ward would provide a broad social theory, Dike would provide social policy relevance, while Walker and Wayland would contribute political economy. Perhaps in the mix would emerge a socio-economics. It was not, however, a realistic agenda.

Albion Small, in the end, had little say in how the department took shape. None of Small's initial cast of faculty were hired. The first professor to be hired – social reformer and AEA member Charles Henderson – was recruited by the university president. Small learned about the appointment in a newsletter (Goodspeed 1926:8). The department was also attached with anthropology and "sanitary science," and Small's input had little to do with this. Contact with economics was never institutionally established. And Small often complained that Chicago "divides departments so that many students never see that the departments are still actually concerned with one and the same subject matter" (quoted in Bannister 1987:36-37)⁹.

The formation of the Chicago department was much more a professional achievement than an intellectual one. "In its first decade Chicago produced only minor and scattered pieces of research" (Shils 1970:770). Small established the *American Journal of Sociology*, though by his own account it was a scramble to fill its pages with worthwhile scholarship (Small 1916:786 fn). Even finding adequate teaching materials was a daunting project. The sociological literature was so limited that "each instructor was thrown upon his own resources to an

⁹ Sociology and economics at Chicago were not, however, entirely isolated. Small often sent his students to study with Thorstein Veblen and others in the economics department (Dorfman 1934:247). In sociology, W.I. Thomas attracted regular attention from the economics students (Mitchell 1941).

extent which made his task desperate" (Small 1916:772). It was not until the 1920s that a coherent "Chicago school" of sociology emerged.

Nevertheless, the founding of a department of sociology could not have happened at a better strategic time and place. The University of Chicago signaled the beginning of a tremendous competitive expansion of the American university system. "The mythical belief spread at once that this upstart institution had the intention, and the resources... to do for the older institutions what the Standard Oil system had done for many of its rivals" (Small 1916:764). Chicago also signaled the formal entrance of sociology into the university curriculum. The profession soared in a climate of "academic rivalry stimulated by [Chicago's] aggressiveness" (Small 1916:765; Oberschall 1972).

3.3 COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Soon after emergence of the Chicago department, Columbia University began to feel that if it was "to keep pace with the leading universities of the country... it now needs a chair of sociology" (quoted in Hoxie 1955:59). The push to bring in sociology was launched by the economics department, made up of professors Richmond Mayo-Smith and Edwin Seligman. Professor Mayo-Smith "pioneered in the teaching of statistics in social science" (Dorfman 1949:Vol 3:92). His two books, *Statistics and Sociology* (1895) and *Statistics and Economics* (1899), became standard references for years. The Columbia tradition of statistical research, in both sociology and economics, began with Mayo-Smith's work. Professor Seligman held broad interests, with work ranging from tax policy to the economic interpretation of history. He defined economics broadly as "the study of the social relations of individuals" (Seligman 1904:64). Later in his career, he became editor-in-chief of the first *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*

(Seligman 1937). In the introduction to the *Encyclopedia*, Seligman expressed the view that sociology was “deeper” than economics or political science and, indeed, was “the most important of the human sciences” (Seligman 1937, Vol.1:5). Both Mayo-Smith and Seligman were trained in Germany, and both were enthusiastic about the potential of sociology.

A professorship of sociology was created in the Columbia economics department in 1894, and the position went to AEA activist Franklin Henry Giddings. At the same time, the department changed its name to “Economics and Social Science”.

Giddings was a self-taught social scientist. He worked as a journalist for ten years before his academic contributions earned him a position at Bryn Mawr College in 1888. At the college he mostly taught political economy, though he also developed a graduate course in sociology. In his early writings, he emphasized “the Sociological Character of Political Economy” (1888). Sociology, in Giddings’ view, constituted an important but neglected branch of economics, which would study how “wealth-production and distribution” interacts with “human nature and social organization” (Giddings 1888:29).

By 1890, Giddings had been elected vice-president of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, and became editor of its *Annals*. He was a founding member of the AEA, took on the editorship of the AEA’s *Publications* in 1891, and was vice-president for 1896-97.

Under Giddings’ direction, and with the support of a top-rank economics faculty, Columbia rose to be a leading center of American sociology. In particular, Giddings was a tremendous proponent of statistical research. He was, however, more of a visionary and enthusiast than a technical expert. He led the push for empiricism in American sociology, though in the early days it was the

economists on faculty that provided his students with advanced statistical training.

Over the years, Giddings trained more than 50 PhD graduates “who held top positions in college, university, publishing, and public affairs” (Odum 1951:87). Six of his students became presidents of the American Sociological Society (Lipset 1955:292). In Turner’s assessment, “no sociologist since, with the possible exception of [Talcott] Parsons, was to so deeply mark his students, and none, including Parsons, had so many successful students” (Turner 1994:45).

Columbia was the most prominent university to follow the lead of Chicago, but many others followed suit; and the Columbia model – sociology within economics – was the norm. At Michigan, the economics department first began pondering a course in sociology in 1892. In 1894 this task was assigned to Charles Horton Cooley, who had just completed his PhD in political economy (Cooley 1969:3-7). At Harvard, the economics department promoted one of its instructors, Edward Cummings, to a position as associate professor of sociology in 1893 (Mason 1982:398). At Pennsylvania, the Wharton School of Finance and Economy hired on an instructor – one of its own graduates – in sociology in 1894 (AAPSS 1894:418). Within two years of the creation of the Chicago department, sociology had spread rapidly into the leading universities – or more precisely, the leading economics departments – of the US. Notably, each of these schools – Columbia, Michigan, Harvard, and Pennsylvania – were centers for German historical economics.

4. THE FORMATION OF A SEPARATE DISCIPLINE: 1900-1930

In the first decade of the 20th century, sociology continued its expansion in the academic world, establishing courses of instruction at over 170 post-secondary institutions in the US. However, the discipline still held fledgling status. Sociology, more often than not, was taught in a department joined with economics, and in most cases the term "sociology" did not even make it into the department's title. It was in this context that the American Sociological Society came into being in December of 1905. When the Society was organized, the leading debate was whether to form as a section of the AEA, or as an separate organization. A sort of middle ground was carved out, where sociology could enjoy an autonomous professional association without giving up annual meetings with economics.

4.1 PROFESSIONAL SOCIOLOGY IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE 20TH CENTURY

In the early days of the new century, the "present state of sociology" – the academic job market for sociologists – was subjected to considerable empirical research. This fact, in itself, reflected swelling confidence in the career track of the sociologist. More importantly, it provides a quantitative historical record for the era in which sociology organized itself as an independent professional body.

By 1909, sociology had made an impressive excursion into the academic world, with some 173 schools offering courses in sociology (Bernard 1909). In most cases, however, these courses were not taught in a department of sociology. The most common title of the department providing sociological

training was "Economics and Sociology."¹⁰ Sociology was taught in many different departments, but the dominant image is sociology as a sort of "young sibling" under the wing of economics.

Sometimes sociology was given formal recognition in the title of the department, more often not. Roughly one-third (36%) of the schools had the term "sociology" in the title of the department that taught the subject. In contrast, more than half (55%) of the schools had "economics" (or "political economy") in the title of the department that taught sociology. Moreover, among the top 15 social science universities in the US, in at least 11 of these universities sociology began in the department of economics.¹¹ From an aggregate departmental view, early sociology appears mostly as a field area of economics.

TABLE 1
TITLE OF DEPARTMENTS TEACHING SOCIOLOGY IN 1909
 (Department title includes the term listed)

	Number of schools
Economics	95 (55%)
Sociology	65 (36%)
History	38 (22%)
Political Science	30 (17%)
Philosophy	11 (6%)
Psychology	6 (3%)
Anthropology	3 (2%)

(Bernard, 1909:186)

The sociology courses available at this time reinforce the image of an enjoined economics and sociology. A 1902 survey of sociological courses yielded a vast and complicated system of classification; the main categories are shown in table 2. The most prominent course, unsurprisingly, is general sociology – the

¹⁰ The three most common department titles in which sociology was taught were 1) "Economics and Sociology" (28 schools); 2) "Sociology" (20 schools); and 3) "Economics" (12 schools) (Bernard 1909).

¹¹ See below for further discussion of these data.

introductory, and often *only*, course offering. "Social economics / industrial sociology" was the leading field area, both in terms of course offerings and the number of schools giving "incidental treatment" to the topic. "Social reform / social problems" followed closely. The logical overlap between these two areas seems clear – indeed, several of the courses are listed under both categories (Tolman 1902).

The core field areas, it seems, were split between two aspects of contemporary society. On one angle, courses studied broad socio-economic theory – usually either defending or disparaging capitalist society. On another angle, courses pried into socio-economic practice, replete with visits to settlement houses and other visual aids, which would either alarm students with the suffering of the poor, or reveal the "defective" traits and habits of the lower classes.¹²

TABLE 2
SOCIOLOGY COURSES OFFERED IN 1902

Course Topic	# of courses	Schools Giving "incidental treatment"
1. General Sociology	111	n/a
2. Social economics / industrial sociology	60	37
3. Social reform / social problems	57 ¹³	10
4. Dependant classes / charities	40	20
5. Criminology / deviance	30	18
6. Role of the state / state and industry / socialism	22	29

(Tolman 1902)

¹² An early outline of Columbia's sociology program well captures this dynamic: "It is in the city that the problems of poverty, of mendicancy, of intemperance, of unsanitary surroundings, and of debasing social influences are met in their most acute form... Here the student can observe how far vice, poverty, and crime are due to bad economic conditions, how far to neglected moral training, how much simply to the social struggle for life" (cited in Tolman, 1902:806).

¹³ Note that six of these courses are also listed as social economics or state/socialism courses. The categories, unfortunately, are not perfectly distinct.

Finally, training in economics was often required before one could enroll in a sociology course. In Bernard's (1909) survey of schools offering sociology, 60 institutions reported that economics was a prerequisite for sociology. No other discipline was a more common prerequisite, though history, as well as a single category labeled "philosophy or psychology or both," closely followed.¹⁴ Political science, required at 25 schools, was much less common as a prerequisite (Bernard 1909:190).

TABLE 3
PREREQUISITES FOR SOCIOLOGY COURSES
1907-08

Subject	# of Schools
Economics	60
Philosophy / psychology	57
History	56
Political Science	25
Education	4

(Bernard 1909:190)

In the first decade of the 20th century, sociology was principally taught in economics departments, its courses were heavily focused on economic issues, and they frequently required economics training as a prerequisite.

4.2 THE FORMATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The beginning of the American Sociological Society was the initiative of Charles Veditz, an economics professor at George Washington University, who spent the summer of 1905 writing to prominent academics with sociological leanings. While all contacted agreed that some organization of sociologists was ideal, opinion was split over whether they should form as section of the AEA or

¹⁴ At this time, psychology and philosophy were not highly differentiated and frequently had joint departments (Ben-David and Collins 1966).

as separate body. Lester Ward, Edward Ross, and Simon Patten advocated a distinct association. Thomas Carver and Samuel Lindsay believed "that it would be unwise, perhaps, to separate at this time from the Economic Association, with which most sociologists are connected, and in which almost all sociologists are interested" (ASS 1906:555). Albion Small, for his part, did not offer a strong opinion, though he doubted that an AEA sociology section should be formed "simply for the practical reason that most of us are members of that body" (ASS 1906:556). He did, however, suggest that a session during the next AEA meeting be organized for sociologists to discuss the whole matter. This would be at a time during the meeting "when the economic papers would be of a sort not necessarily of interest to the sociologists" (ASS 1906:556).

With the assistance of the AEA, an activist core of nine sociologists arranged and promoted the session. These were Albion Small, Edward Ross, Franklin Giddings, Lester Ward, Samuel Lindsay, Charles Veditz, Thomas Carver, William Graham Sumner, and Simon Patten (ASS 1906:557). It is notable that of this group, all but one were AEA members. The sole exception was Sumner – one of the first professors of political economy in the US – who boycotted the AEA until his death. Only two – Giddings and Ward – did not have graduate training in economics. And four were past or future AEA executives¹⁵. More broadly, they were some of the leading figures at Chicago, Columbia, Harvard, Yale, and the Wharton School at Pennsylvania.

At the 1905 gathering of economic thinkers, a group of about 50 began organizing the American Sociological Society. The debate over separating from economics continued, but the energy of the gathering was perhaps best captured by Charles Ellwood, who commented,

The American Economic Association has occasionally had on its program papers dealing with sociological problems; but if this can satisfy the group of American sociologists, we shall but proclaim to the world our lack of interest in, and enthusiasm for, the science in which we are working. (ASS 1906:560).

The sociological group had ambitions and momentum that could not be contained within the AEA. But perhaps more important were the optics of the situation. Psychology had formed a professional association as early as 1892, anthropology in 1902, and political science in 1903. Sociology had become conspicuous for its lack of an independent professional organization. A professional body, as Albion Small argued, would allow sociology "to stand up and be counted more definitely" (ASS 1906:558).

Countering this ambition was a sense that sociologists might be over-extending their reach. Charles Horton Cooley, after the meeting, privately confessed that "I have no great expectations from the movement" (Jandy 1969:60). It was not clear, nor even claimed, that the research productivity of sociologists had outgrown their place at the AEA. Nor was there an expression of discontent with the nature of contemporary economics. The majority of those attending the organizational meeting were AEA members¹⁵, and almost all of them continued to renew their AEA memberships (Oberschall 1972:221). In short, sociologists had great desire to proclaim their autonomous professional status, but as of yet had little practical need for a separate organization and even less interest in severing their ties with economists.

¹⁵ Edward Ross was AEA secretary during 1892-93. Giddings was vice-president during 1896-97. Simon Patten was president in 1908. Thomas Carver was president in 1916.

¹⁶ There is no record of who attended the first meeting (Dec. 27, 1905). The ASS properly came into existence at a meeting the next day. Of the 36 listed as present, 26 (72%) were AEA members in 1905 (ASS 1906:565; AEA membership list).

The solution to this dilemma was straightforward. It was decided that the new organization should meet at the same time and place as the AEA.

There ought, to be sure, to be one or more "joint meetings," in which problems are discussed which are germane to both economics and sociology; and these meetings would emphasize the close relationship which subsists between economics and sociology... (ASS 1906:563)

These joint meetings, as the archival records show, continued consistently over the following decades.

4.3 ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The published programs of professional academic gatherings are a telling record of interdisciplinary activity. The American Sociological Society, in most years, published the programs of its annual meetings. For some years, the "program" is somewhat vague. For example, the published notice for the 1908 meeting merely states,

The Sociological Society will hold seven sessions, one of which will be a joint meeting with the Economic Association and another of which will be a joint meeting with the American Statistical Association. (AJS 1908:408)

In general, however, the programs are highly detailed, listing the speakers and often the presentation titles. A more typical record – this one from the 1911 meeting – reads,

8 pm. Joint session of the American Economic Association and the American Sociological Society. Large Banquet Hall on the Tenth Story of the Hotel Raleigh...

Presidential Addresses:

1. Prof. Franklin H. Giddings, President of the American Sociological Society. The Quality of Civilization.

2. Prof. Henry W. Farnam, President of the American Economic Association. *The Economic Utilization of History*. (AER 1912)

For each professional association that attended the annual meetings of the ASS, a count was taken of the years when there was a joint presidential address, and the years when there was at least one joint working session. These counts, added together, are loosely described as the number of joint meetings.

Some patchwork was required. For the first eight years of the ASS (1906-1913), the programs of the annual meetings were not generally published (1908 is the only one available). For these years, data was taken from the programs of the American Economic Association (1906-1913)¹⁷, the American Political Science Association (1906-1913), and the American Statistical Association (1908, 1909, and 1912). These three associations cover the groups with the closest links to sociology¹⁸. From 1914 to 1935, the final programs of the annual meetings were printed in the *Publications of the American Sociological Society*. From 1936 to 1955, the preliminary programs were advertised in the *American Sociological Review*¹⁹. The data, compiled together, make up a 50-year time series on the interdisciplinary of the sociology meetings.

The first three decades of the ASS contained the most intensive interdisciplinary contact with economics. Only data for these years are discussed in this section. The full time series – changes in the pattern of contact over the years – is taken up later.

¹⁷ Programs were published in the supplement to the *American Economic Review* (Papers and Proceedings). Before the establishment of the AER in 1911, programs were published in the *Publications of the American Economic Association*, which was for several years titled the *American Economic Association Quarterly*.

¹⁸ This judgment is based on joint meetings data for 1914-1955. Both the American Psychological Association and the American Anthropology Association were established before the ASS, but neither held a joint meeting with sociology until the 1940s.

At the ASS meetings, economists were represented by three different professional organizations. The American Economics Association (AEA) was most prominent, with 25 joint meetings in the 30 years between 1906 and 1935. Two-thirds of these meetings were joint presidential addresses. The American Farm Economics Association, which had close contact with the ASS section on rural sociology, held 11 joint meetings. The American Association for Labour Legislation was present for 7 joint meetings. Combining these three into one category, economists and sociologists organized 43 joint meetings. Indeed, in the three decades between 1906 and 1935, there were only 5 years in which economists were not officially present at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Society.

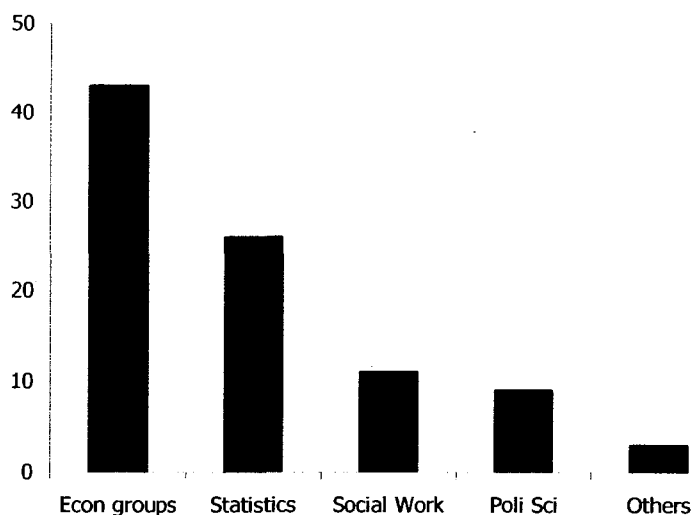
Another prominent group at the sociology meetings was the statisticians. The American Statistical Association had joint sessions or joint presidential addresses 26 times between 1906 and 1935. This reflects a period in which sociology had a strong interest in – and played a key role in developing – quantitative methods. The general tendency was for meetings with economics and statistics to occur together²⁰.

Political Science had a noticeable but quiet role, with 9 joint meetings scattered throughout the years. For a period in the 1920s, sociologists took a very strong interest in meeting with social workers, largely represented by the National Community Centers Association. Eleven meetings were held with the social work group.

¹⁹ The program for the 1953 meeting was not published. Given the variety of professional associations assembling with the ASS in the later years, no attempt was made to find supplementary data. This year is excluded from the analysis.

²⁰ The correlation between joint economics and joint statistics meetings is +0.5. In contrast, the correlation between joint economics and joint "others" (excluding stats) meetings is -0.05.

FIGURE 1: JOINT ANNUAL MEETINGS OF THE AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL SOCIETY
 TOTAL NUMBER OF JOINT MEETINGS (PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESSES AND WORKING SESSIONS) WITH EACH GROUP, 1906-1935.



For the first three decades of the American Sociological Society, its interdisciplinary relations were grounded in economics, closely followed by statistics. Other social sciences and professional groups were comparatively distant. Meetings with economists were almost three-and-a-half times more common than those with either political scientists or social workers. And it was not until the 1940s that groups like anthropology or psychology ever appeared at the ASS meetings.

4.4 A CASE STUDY OF INTERDISCIPLINARITY: STATISTICAL SOCIAL SCIENCE

In the two decades between the world wars, statistical research captured the power centers of American social science. Practitioners shared a strong sense that they were building a new foundation for social science. Methodology, rather than just discipline, was the thing quantitative researchers were promoting. The network of statistical researchers spread out through joint

departments, joint professional meetings, employment in government agencies, activism in the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), and projects such as the President's Research Committee on Recent Social Trends.

The leading figures of quantitative social science were William Ogburn in sociology and Wesley Mitchell in economics. Ogburn was a student of Franklin Giddings, and achieved a level of eminence unique among sociologists. He served as president of both the American Sociological Society and the American Statistical Association. He was chairman of the Social Science Research Council, the US Census Advisory Committee, and research director of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends. Wesley Mitchell held a similar prominence: star economist at Columbia, former student of Thorstein Veblen, served terms as the president of the American Economic Association, the American Statistical Association, and as the chairman of the SSRC, founder of the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), and one of the most heavily-cited economists of the inter-war years (Rutherford 1987; Snowden and Vane 1997). Together, they were the center points of a closely overlapping academic network that constituted the social science elite for almost two decades.

Business cycle research was an early meeting point between Ogburn and Mitchell. It was Mitchell who coined the term "business cycle" – which was meant to imply that economic disruption was a result of laissez faire business practice rather than of "natural" economic forces. He established the National Bureau of Economic Research to investigate the dynamics of economic turbulence. Ogburn, for his part, took up the task of documenting the social damage left in the wake of the business cycle. In his paper "The Fluctuations of Business as Social Forces," he used advanced statistical research to refute the idea that the "free will of the individual is responsible" for trends in unemployment, divorce, or

crime. Much individual behaviour, he found, was strongly correlated with the business cycle (Ogburn 1923:78).

This was the beginning of a long-term collaboration between Ogburn and Mitchell. At the Social Science Research Council, both were major activists and both served terms as chair of the organization. The SSRC, like other funders, "saw disciplinarity as an obstacle to the development of the problem-solving capacities of social science" (Turner 1994:57). The Mitchell-Ogburn business cycle collaboration was a model of the SSRC's vision for social science.

The SSRC's highest-profile project, beginning in the late 1920s, was the President's Research Committee on Recent Social Trends. The Committee was, in essence, a fact finding mission organized by president Hoover and largely funded by the Rockefeller Foundation (via the SSRC). Wesley Mitchell was the chairman, Ogburn the director of research. Its findings included 39 chapters authored by leading academics from across the social sciences. The major goal of the committee was to "unite such problems as those of economics, government, religion, [and] education, in a comprehensive study of social movements and tendencies" (1933:xiii). A central organizing device, laid out in the introduction, was Ogburn's theories of social change and cultural evolution.

Around the same time, the first *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* was in preparation. Comprising 12 volumes, and tapping a huge number of academic researchers, it was an unprecedented effort to bring together the vast body of social scientific knowledge. Both Ogburn and Mitchell were on the board of directors of the project and acted as advisory editors (Seligman 1937).

The extensive collaboration between Mitchell and Ogburn stemmed from two basic sources. Firstly, both figures shared a broad socio-economic outlook. Wesley Mitchell was a former student of Thorstein Veblen and a leading figure of

the institutionalist movement in economics (Rutherford 1987). He rejected the approach of theorizing about “imaginary individuals coming to imaginary markets,” directing greater attention to the institutions and social processes that shape market behaviour (Mitchell 1950:26). William Ogburn, in his early theoretical work, wrote on the economic interpretation of history, analyzing the crusades and the “economic exploitation of primitive peoples” (Ogburn 1919:304). In the 1920s, he expanded his ideas about history into a broad theory of cultural evolution, heavily influenced by Thorstein Veblen and the anthropologist Franz Boas. The worldviews of Mitchell and Ogburn, in short, drew little distinction between the sociological and the economic.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, both Ogburn and Mitchell were outspoken advocates for statistical research (Ogburn 1930a; Rutherford 1987). Their interlocking academic networks did not constitute a system of rival professions. Rather, they were developing and promoting a shared methodology. It was a joint task of building the reputability of, and the funding base for, statistical social science.

5. TOWARDS THE POST-WAR DIVISION OF LABOUR

On this background of collaboration and mutual interest, when and why did the two disciplines part ways? In section 5.1, the quantitative data are employed to pin down the timing of the separation. Building upon this, the two following sections will grapple with the question of why.

The disengagement between economics and sociology can be charted across three quantitative measures: the decline of joint professional memberships, the establishment of separate departments, and the eventual termination of joint annual meetings. Overall, it seems the separation of

economics and sociology was a gradual drift over several decades, though coming to an abrupt conclusion around World War II. Two major events were crucial in the final termination of interdisciplinary relations: 1) Talcott Parsons' territorial skirmishes with the institutional economists, which contributed to the downfall of economic institutionalism; and 2) the rise of mathematical economics, which opened a great methodological divide between the disciplines.

5.1 THREE MEASURES OF SEPARATION

The establishment of the American Sociological Society was an important point in the transition from sponsorship to collaboration between economics and sociology. For two decades, sociologists relied on the AEA to provide an annual meeting place for the building of a professional network. Once the ASS was formed sociologists could collaborate with economists as they saw fit, but no longer needed their support to hold working sessions on sociological questions. This growing independence can be seen in the pattern of joint memberships between the two organizations.

All of the activists who initiated the ASS were closely involved with the economics discipline. Some 53% of the first-year membership of the ASS were also AEA members, and few of these academics ever gave up their AEA membership. However, as the organization expanded, it drew most of its new members from outside of economics. By 1928, only 12% were AEA members (Rice and Green 1929). But sociology did not seem to draw in members from the other disciplines either. Less than 4% of the membership was affiliated with the American Political Science Association in 1928. More than 20 years after the formation of the ASS, economists remained sociology's main professional connection to the other social sciences. However, with only a 12% membership

overlap, by the late 1920s there was considerable distinction between the organizations.

The declining importance of economics as a sponsor for the academic status of sociology is also seen in the trend of joint departments. In the 1909 survey of universities, mentioned earlier, sociology was most frequently taught in the departments of economics. Only 36% of the departments teaching the subject had the term "sociology" in their title, and only 12% were independent sociology departments (Bernard 1909). By 1945, a full 90% of the departments had the term "sociology" in their title, and 70% were independent departments (titled "department of sociology") (Bernard 1945:543).

Looking specifically at the top 15 universities in the US reinforces this picture²¹. In 11 out of the top 15 schools in the US, the sociology department was formed by splitting off faculty from a joint economics department. At three other universities there was no immediate precedent for sociology (Chicago, Minnesota, and Johns Hopkins), and in one case the history was unclear (Illinois).

The major wave of department separation began in the prosperity of the 1920s. At Columbia, sociology fully separated from economics in 1924. Northwestern detached from economics in 1926. At Michigan and Wisconsin, the separation was in 1929. At Harvard, plans for a sociology department began in the late 1920s, and the project was completed in 1931. At the remaining schools, separation was scattered over the next few decades.

²¹ The top 15 universities were selected using Froman's (1942) data on the number of graduate students in economics from 1904 to 1928. Thus, the size of the graduate economics programs is taken as a proxy for the social science standing of universities. The resulting list is intuitive and offers an almost identical ranking as Frank (1923) found for social science as a whole in the early 1920s. Data for grad students in sociology would be preferable, but these are unavailable.

TABLE 4.
THE CREATION OF SEPARATE SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENTS.
 TOP 15 UNIVERSITIES IN THE US.²²

UNIVERSITY	GRAD STUDENTS IN ECONOMICS, 1904-28	YEAR SOCIOLOGY DEPARTMENT FORMED	PREVIOUS LOCATION OF SOCIOLOGY
Chicago	754	1894	no precedent
Illinois	174	1907	?
Minnesota	191	1910	no precedent
Columbia	1171	1924	Economics & Sociology
Northwestern	101	1926	Economics
Wisconsin	522	1929	Political Economy
Michigan	110	1929	Political Economy & Sociology
Harvard	490	1931	Economics. Social Ethics. (Two separate departments)
Yale	148	1937	Economics, Sociology, and Government
Cornell	234	approx. 1939	Economics and Social Psychology
California	136	1946	Economics & Social Science
Johns Hopkins	141	1959	no immediate precedent
Princeton	97	1962	Economics & Social Institutions
Pennsylvania	353	?	Wharton School of Finance and Economy
Ohio	140	?	Economics & Sociology

Harvard University makes for an interesting case study, for here there were two departments laying claim to sociology: social ethics and economics. Holding radically different viewpoints on both methodological and ideological orientation, a sort of stalemate persisted until the 1930s. Social ethics upheld a religious-inspired, moral uplift approach, while economics provided a

disorganized mixture of 'neoclassical sociology' and German historicism (Potts 1965; Mason 1982; Vincent 1906). Early on, the economics department had been pressing the social ethics faculty to move in the "general direction of what we call Sociology". By the late 1920s, economists felt that the only legacy of social ethics was a "halting and unsatisfactory" development of sociology that had merely checked their own efforts (Potts 1965:114-15). By 1930, the social ethics department was disintegrating, just as faculty turnover was occurring in economics. The economics department recruited and installed Pirtrim Sorokin as head of a newly formed sociology department (in 1931). Talcott Parsons, a non-faculty instructor in Harvard economics, was also transferred (Church 1965; Potts 1965; Mason 1982). The Harvard case is telling, for even where there was not a joint department, economics faculty still felt a strong sense of responsibility for the development of sociology.

In any event, it seems clear that in the 1920s, sociology was firmly established as an academic profession. When the American Sociological Society was formed in 1905, sociology could claim independent status at only one of the top 15 universities (Chicago). By the close of the 1920s, the discipline held independent departments in half of the leading universities in the US.

It is important to emphasize the distinction between sponsorship and collaboration in the relations between economics and sociology. Sociologists long sought to take their place among the respectable social sciences, without requiring sponsorship from economics. But this autonomous standing did not imply a fundamental division between sociology and economics. In the early

²² Precise dates of separation and previous department titles was determined from a variety of sources: 1) sociology department internet homepages (many of which summarize the history of the department); 2) correspondence with sociology department faculty; 3) correspondence with archivists at university libraries; and 4) published accounts of university histories. In three cases (Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Ohio), complete information could not be determined.

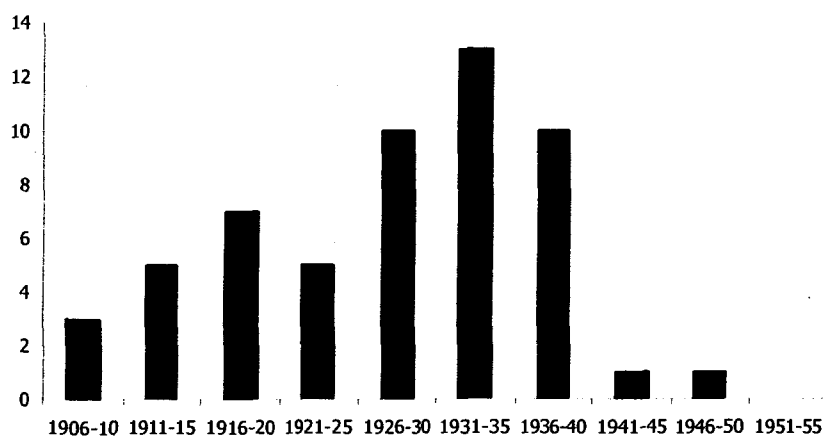
years of American social science, the philosopher John Dewey was asked of his views on sociology as a separate department. He replied "I don't feel at all sure. It would seem well to have it a separate branch, in order to make sure that it received proper attention, but I think it a great pity if it means isolation..." (quoted in Howerth 1894:116). The dilemma that Dewey points to, between autonomy and isolation, was largely resolved through collaboration and discourse between academic associations.

Annual professional gatherings are something less entangled with strategic concerns or resource constraints than the other trends examined. They are more voluntary than the building of an autonomous association or the founding of separate departments. Thus, more than anything else, the trend of joint annual meetings charts the evolution of interdisciplinary interest.

There were three professional economics groups, as mentioned before, that met with the ASS: the American Economic Association, the American Farm Economics Association, and the American Association for Labour Legislation. The aggregate trend of meetings with these groups is charted in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2: TRENDS IN JOINT ANNUAL MEETINGS

NUMBER OF JOINT ANNUAL MEETINGS WITH ECONOMISTS, 1906-1955. FIVE-YEAR TOTALS.



Note: Refer to section 4.3 for methodological details.

Annual meetings with economists increased almost without interruption over the first three decades of the ASS. There were three joint meetings in the first five years of the ASS (1906-1910), and they peaked in the Depression years of 1931-1935, with 13 meetings (a more than three-fold increase). By the 1940s, interdisciplinary meetings broke off and were never reestablished.

One important factor to note is that the membership of both associations increased significantly during this period, and the total number of working sessions (joint or otherwise) expanded. In a sense, one could suggest that, until the 1940s, the number of joint meetings loosely kept pace with the growth of the disciplines.

The gradual increase of joint annual meetings before World War II is also partly due to the formation of the American Farm Economics Association, created in 1917. Several years later, a formal ASS "section on rural sociology" was organized. The two networks first met together in 1924, when Harvard economist and sociologist T.N. Carver served as AFEA president. The event was a success, and over the next 15 years, the AFEA and the ASS section on rural sociology held joint working sessions in every year but one.

After 1938, the AFEA never again appeared at the ASS. This abrupt termination is an artifact of the data source. In 1937, a separate Rural Sociological Society was organized, and the AFEA continued to meet with rural sociologists independently of the ASS meetings²³.

Sociology's longest standing relations were with the American Economic Association. Joint professional gatherings with the AEA peaked during the First World War, with six meetings between 1916 and 1920. The massive expansion

²³ The RSS continued to hold joint meetings with the AFEA until as late as 1959.

of government controls during the war years brought to the forefront an endless number of socioeconomic policy problems. At the same time, the wartime government bureaus built up the infrastructure for large-scale statistical research in both economics and sociology.

During the 1920s, contact with the AEA remained steady with seven joint meetings over the decade. It is notable, however, that after 1921, joint *working sessions* were exceedingly rare. After 1921, there were 11 joint presidential addresses, but only two joint working sessions. Presidential addresses are the keynote lectures with the largest academic audiences of the year, and the fact that they were so often held jointly indicates widespread mutual interest. Indeed, these were an important venue for economists and sociologists to keep informed of the leading work in each other's discipline. Presidential addresses are customarily more of a broad review rather than a detailed presentation of research. After the early 1920s, the more detailed working sessions were left for field areas with the AFEA and the Association for Labor Legislation.

The onset of the Great Depression sparked intense interest in joint discourse. From 1929 to 1933, the AEA and the ASS held five back-to-back joint presidential addresses. Activity petered off from there, with only two more meetings over the rest of the decade.

The Second World War did not have the same effect on interdisciplinary social science as did the first. Despite the detailed government controls on industry and society, it was not an occasion for joint policy studies at the professional associations. Methodologically, economists became closely involved in military "operations research," which developed, refined, and popularized applied mathematical programming and statistical forecasting (Mirowski 1999). Sociologists were drawn into the war effort as well, but largely for studies of

soldier moral using the familiar social survey techniques. A methodological gap thus opened between the disciplines. In any event, during the war, contact with the AEA ground to a halt. The last joint presidential address between the groups was held in 1939. Several years after the war, a joint working session was organized while Talcott Parsons was the ASS president, but this was the last formal gathering of the two associations.

The American Association for Labor Legislation, founded in 1906, is the third professional economics association that held regular meetings with sociology. Though it was formed only a few months after the ASS, the two groups did not hold their first joint meeting until 1919, and the second was not until 1928. The Great Depression, it seems, was the provocation for regular contact. From 1930 to 1942, there were 11 joint meetings between the two, constituting a major interdisciplinary forum for labour market analysis and policy studies. However, enthusiasm in both disciplines seemed to fade in the later years, partly due to disagreements over major policy issues (such as the design of unemployment insurance). By the mid 1940s, the AALL dissolved (Chasse 1991). The labour market continued to be an important area of research for both economics and sociology, but after the AALL's unraveling, there was no formal venue for interdisciplinary collaboration.

TABLE 5: JOINT ANNUAL MEETINGS, 1906-1955

FIVE-YEAR TOTALS

	AEA	AALL	AFEA	Econ Groups
1906-10	3	0	0	3
1911-15	5	0	0	5
1916-20	6	1	0	7
1921-25	4	0	1	5
1926-30	3	2	5	10
1931-35	4	4	5	13
1936-40	2	5	3	10
1941-45	0	1	0	1
1946-50	1	0	0	1
1951-55	0	0	0	0
Total	28	13	14	55

By the 1940s, joint meetings with any economics association had effectively ended. In the 15 years between 1941 to 1955, there were only two joint meetings with economics. However, there was growing contact with other social sciences. The anthropologists were present for three meetings. An eclectic handful of others made one-time appearances, including the American Psychological Association, the Population Association of America, the American Studies Society, and the National Institute of Mental Health. For the first time in ASS history, joint meetings with other social sciences outnumbered those with economics – and they did so by a wide margin.

A vote of the ASS membership in 1946 provides some interesting insight into sociologists' attitudes towards joint meetings. The membership voted to maintain greater distance from the other social sciences. The balance of opinion was that "we should hold some meetings 'by ourselves,' but every second or third meeting should be held with other groups." While there was a faction of the ASS with a "strongly held preference" to resume regular joint meetings, this was not the majority view (ASR 1946:632). There was a sense, it seems, that sociologists' own meetings were too important to be distracted with interdisciplinary activity. The early concern that professional autonomy might

lead to isolation finds some clear vindication here, albeit 40 years after the formation of the ASS.

The same membership vote also showed sociologists' relative interest in different social sciences. By this time, anthropology, rather than economics, ranked as the first choice for a joint meeting. This seems as a significant change in preferences. Though the American Anthropological Association was formed in 1902, the two never held a joint meeting until 1944. Still, economics continued to hold interest among the membership, ranking as second choice – receiving more votes than psychology (3rd), political science (4th), and a number of other disciplines (ASR 1946:632). Thus, even in the mid-1940s, there remained significant appetite for joint meetings with economics. This suggests that it was economics, at least more so than sociology, that was actively withdrawing from the relationship.

In summary, presented here are three general measures of interdisciplinary relations, which give somewhat different indications of when, exactly, the separation of economics and sociology took place. The view from joint memberships is that the drift apart began with the formation of the American Sociological Society in 1906. Particularly for the following generations of academics, there seemed little value in holding dual memberships, and the membership lists were very clearly distinct groups by 1928. Joint departments tell a different story, as among the top US universities, the major wave of separation occurred in the mid- to late-1920s, following the significant separation of the memberships. This was likely a separation of opportunity: the economic prosperity of the 1920s expanded faculties and provided resources for sociologists to realize their ambition of autonomous professional status. Joint meetings provide yet another image of disciplinary relations. Professional

gatherings of economists and sociologists peaked in the mid-1930s, and effectively ended in the early 1940s. Here we find the termination of active dialogue between economists and sociologists.

5.2 "OUR FRIEND AND OPPONENT": TALCOTT PARSONS AND INSTITUTIONAL ECONOMICS

In the 1930s, there was a crucial debate over the nature of economics, which prominently featured 'intervention' by an ambitious sociologist who was originally trained in institutional economics: Talcott Parsons. Parsons sought, and helped achieve, a narrowed definition of economics. The broad study of the institutions of capitalism, Parsons argued, was properly the material of sociology, rather than economics. At the end of the episode, economics and sociology had arrived, more or less, at a division of labour that no longer required interdisciplinary contact. It was not, however, a division of labour that any party to the debate had actually advocated.

Before World War II, there was no single dominant tradition of economics in the US. Institutional economics was a powerful force in the inter-war years, with its advocates frequently occupying the presidency of the American Economic Association, building institutions such as the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), holding positions in the top economics departments, and leading the indices of cited publications (Rutherford 1997). Paul Homan, a student and critic of institutionalism, observed at the beginning of the 1930s that the project had "caused the whole structure of economic theory to be subjected to searching and critical scrutiny." The "incompleteness" of neoclassical economics – its "waning importance" and even "disrepute" – had "been made sufficiently plain" (Homan 1932:15).

The institutional economists were the American continuation of the historical tradition – students of the early American economists trained in Germany. The institutionalist project was to study “the conventions, customs, habits of thinking, and modes of doing which make up... ‘the economic order’” (Hamilton 1919:311). The work of Thorstein Veblen held tremendous influence; sociologists like Charles Horton Cooley and Edward Ross also contributed foundational works for the movement. Cooley taught several of the leading institutional economists and was “second only to Veblen in his general influence in establishing the institutional point of view” (Homan 1937:392; Hamilton 1919). Edward Ross’ conceptual work on ‘social control’ was “perhaps their [the institutionalists] central organizing principle” – expressed in the many works on the theme of the ‘social control of business’ (Everett 1937).

The term “social economics” was frequently passed around in the early days, both in economics and sociology (Tolman 1902). J.M. Clark, one of the leading theorists in the institutionalist school, differentiated narrow “price economics” from the broader “social economics” of authors like Thorstein Veblen (Clark 1919:281). His colleague, David Friday, used the term “sociological economists”²⁴. Veblen, even in his most “economic” work – *The Theory of Business Enterprise* – felt that his writings tended to exceed the “legitimate bounds of economic discussion” and venture into “the field of the sociologist”. He justified this “fault” by insisting that the “features of general culture... bear too intimately on the economic situation” to ignore them (Veblen [1904] 1996:XX). The handle “institutional economics” was actually devised by a sociologist, Max Handman, who suggested it during a conversation with Veblen (Rutherford

²⁴ David Friday to Walter Stewart, Sept. 21, 1912, HC Adams Papers, Box 13, David Friday Folders. Friday a professor of economics at Michigan. He studied under Charles Cooley and HC Adams, and graduated with Walton Hamilton and Walter Stewart.

2000:278 fn1). By the beginning of the 1920s, the term “institutional economics” had widespread currency, and the movement – which really began with the German historical economics – had a renewed vigor in the US.

Yet, by the 1930s, a backlash against institutionalism was brewing. The advocates of neoclassical economics set out to narrow the range of work that could legitimately be described as economics. Early on, the Austrian economist Carl Menger had attacked the German historical school for, among other offenses, wanting “to sublimate pure economics into a theory of social phenomenon in their totality” (Menger [1883] 1963:79). Menger’s desire to exclude broad social theory from economics presented one of the earliest disciplinary fractures in the study of capitalism.

In the early 1930s, an ambitious young English economist named Lionel Robbins revived Menger’s critique in a caustic treatise, *An Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* (Robbins 1946). Though controversial at the time, Robbins laid out what is now the standard definition of economics.

“Economic Science”, according to Robbins, was a study of scarcity and the satisfaction of wants. “It consists of deductions” from a set of assumptions held to be “obvious” and “universal facts of experience,” such as rationality, scarcity, ordered preferences, and so on (1946:99). The framework of individualistic means-ends rationality was central. Economics, in Robbins’ view, was a science of choice²⁵.

What was excluded from Robbins definition was, not by coincidence, most of the work of the German historical and American institutional schools. “The

²⁵ Economics as a science of choice was a sharp departure from popular views of what the discipline was about. For the historical and institutionalist schools, economics was a study of the “economic order”. Even Alfred Marshall, the principle architect of the neoclassical revolution, defined economics broadly as “a study of mankind in the ordinary business of life” (Marshall 1920:1).

German Historical School," Robbins declared, "was responsible for the intrusion of all sorts of sociological and ethical elements which cannot, by the widest extension of the meaning of the words, be described as *Economic History*" (Robbins 1946:40). The "only difference" between American institutionalism and German historicism, Robbins added, was that institutionalism was a "lesser school" of the German studies (ibid:83).

Much of the historical and institutional economics focused on the "ends," rather than the "means", of economic behaviour – studies of how culture, values, and traditions shaped peoples' goals and aspirations (for example, Weber's study of the "Protestant ethic"). Robbins repeatedly insisted that "economics is not concerned with ends as such" (1946:24). "Ultimate objectives" or values were a black box of subjectivity "out of place in a scientific explanation" (ibid:87).

Talcott Parsons, writing in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (Parsons 1932; 1934; 1935) was one of the most prominent figures in the American debate around Robbins' *Essay*. And in Parsons, Robbins found an unlikely ally.

Talcott Parsons first entered the social sciences after encountering the institutionalists Walton Hamilton and Clarence Ayres in his undergraduate studies at Amherst. Though he was initially studying biology, he was "was converted to the social sciences" and got his degree in economics (Parsons 1959:3). In his institutionalist courses, "we read Sumner's *Folkways*, and a whole lot of things by people like Charles Horton Cooley and Emile Durkheim. We also read a lot of Thorstein Veblen..." (Parsons 1959:4). Afterward, Parsons spent a year at the London School of Economics, studying under leading theorists such as Leonard Hobhouse, Richard Tawney, and Bronislaw Malinowski. His time at LSE, Parsons

felt, largely reinforced “the Hamilton-Ayers [institutionalist] point of view” (quoted in Camic 1991:xviii)²⁶.

From London, Parsons moved on to study in Heidelberg, Germany, where he obtained his PhD in economics and sociology²⁷. Here Parsons was fully immersed in the German tradition of historical economics. Parsons had never heard of Max Weber before arriving²⁸, but he quickly became a close part of the “Weber circle” that included Marianne Weber, Alfred Weber, Karl Mannheim, and others. His dissertation was a study of capitalism, focusing on the theories of Werner Sombart and Max Weber (Parsons 1928; 1929). He soon began the work of translating *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Weber 1930).

After Heidelberg, Parsons returned to Amherst for an instructorship in economics, teaching both introductory economics and an advanced course in European social theory. The head of Amherst economics “persuaded [him] that... [he] needed to know much more about” orthodox economics and arranged for him an instructorship in economics at Harvard, opening up a career path while undertaking additional course work in neoclassical theory (Parsons 1970:827). Parsons was ambitious enough to hope that Harvard economics would make room for his German/institutionalist ideas. He was wrong, and he spent nine years stagnating “lower in rank than an untenured assistant professor” (Camic 1991:xl).

Soon, Parsons found himself standing on the borderline between one of the most prestigious economics departments in the world and a fledgling, ad hoc

²⁶ Hamilton had developed a number of contacts with the LSE faculty, and Parsons’ choice of schools may well have been suggested by Hamilton.

²⁷ The PhD involved oral exams in two minor and two major fields. The minor fields Parsons chose were European history and modern philosophy, with majors in economic theory and sociological theory (Camic 1991:xxii).

creation titled "Committee on Sociology and Social Ethics," largely made up of faculty from economics and a dying department of social ethics. In 1931, the committee was dissolved with the creation of a new department of sociology. His transfer to sociology, which was difficult to procure, was essentially an alternative to his dismissal from Harvard. It was strongly supported by senior faculty who appreciated him but knew his days in Harvard economics were limited (Camic 1991:xxxv-xxxvii, xli). In short, the scene at Harvard was much different than at Heidelberg, which "did not force [him] to choose" between the disciplines (Parsons 1959:6).

It was with this background that Parsons entered the debate over the nature of economics. Certainly, Parsons could not accept Robbins' claim that the German/institutional approaches were "unscientific" nonsense. But already pushed out of the economics faculty, he could accept that his work was "not economics". Parsons closely followed the major thrust of Robbins critique: that economics is – or rather should be – a narrowly focused science of choice. Writing in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Parsons warned that institutionalism would transform economics into an "encyclopedic sociology". The institutionalists were rewriting economics to be a "complete philosophy of history" that swallowed up everything but the core of price economics (Parsons 1935:439). The solution lied in narrowing economics and expanding sociology; it was, in short, a problem of redrawing disciplinary boundaries.

Thus, when Parsons set out to describe the proper space and limits of economics, he wholeheartedly adopted Robbins' definition. Economics was a study of individual choice constrained by scarcity (which forces people to

²⁸ Parsons received an exchange scholarship to study in Germany. He was "assigned to Heidelberg with no personal voice in the matter" and "had no real of idea of what [he] was going to encounter" (Parsons 1970:827; 1959:4).

economize). It is a world of "intermediate means-ends relationships," carefully neglecting, as Robbins insisted, the realm of "ultimate ends". The place of sociology lies at the termination of the "means-ends" chain. In the intermediate stages of the means-ends chain, means and ends overlap in a spiraling system of motivation. Employment is desired as a means to income, which is desired as a means to goods and services, which are perhaps desired as a means to social status, and so on. At some point, the means-ends chain is exhausted, arriving at the "ultimate ends" of social action. Here we find the values, beliefs, ideals and norms that guide human conduct in a broad sense. Sombart's "spirit" of an age, Weber's "Protestant ethic," Durkheim's "collective conscience," and so on, are all tied together by their inquiry into "ultimate ends". The expression of these values is the institutions that regulate and channel individual actions. "Action," Parsons wrote, "can only be understood as in some way dependent upon and related to... a socially integrated system of ultimate ends" (1934:524). It is *broadly held* social values that give society its coherence and stability – social integration based on common values.

Thus, we arrive at two basic frames of reference: 1) social action as economizing behaviour, and 2) social action as structured by institutional norms or a common value system. The division of labour in social science, Parsons argued, should be based on these "analytical factors," or frames of reference, rather than on "departments" of social life. "Economic" life cannot be separated from "sociological" life. The economy is *not* the pure territory of the economist. Most prominently, the institutions that regulate economic life are "a specifically non-economic factor" – the material of sociology ([1934] 1991:530).

Parsons' anatomy of social action nicely illustrates the how the economic and the sociological viewpoints overlap. An "act," in Parsons view, involves four basic elements:

- 1) an "end" (or goal) of action – "a future state of affairs to which the process of action is oriented";
- 2) "conditions" that frame social action and are beyond the actor's control;
- 3) "means" of action that the actor employs to achieve goals;
- 4) a "normative orientation" that guides an actor's "choice of means" to achieving a particular end. (Parsons 1937:44)

Thus Parsons offers an "embeddedness" thesis similar to what Polanyi (1944) suggested. The "choice of means" to achieve broadly defined goals is framed by normative orientations. This perspective is put to work by Parsons in two excellent essays, "The Professions and the Social Structure" ([1939] 1954) and "Motivation in Economic Life" ([1940] 1954).

The world of competitive business, Parsons wrote, has long been characterized by acquisitiveness and self-interest. The professional world, however, is characterized by quite the opposite – "disinterestedness." "The professional man," says Parsons, "is not thought to be engaged in the pursuit of his personal profit, but in performing services to his patients or clients, or to impersonal values like the advancement of science." Professionals are expected to adhere to a strong set of professional ethics which place their clients' interest above their own and emphasize an intrinsic value of their work (Parsons [1939] 1954:35,38).

"The institutional pattern governing professional activity does not, in the same way, sanction the pursuit of self-interest" as do the rules and expectations governing business conduct. Ultimately, this points to the different paths to achieving a generic goal of success (Parsons [1939] 1954:38,43-4).

Parsons generates several key conclusions from this. First, professions are "closely interwoven into the fabric of modern society." Many of the crucial features of society – education, science, medicine, engineering, and law – are governed by professional norms and structures rather than the system of business contract. Thus, it seems quite misleading to characterize modern economic life as guided by business principles or any such "'mercenary' orientation" (Parsons [1939] 1954:34-5; [1940] 1954:65, fn 6).

Second, business itself is not a "natural" world of free enterprise and undiluted self-interest – it is no less institutionally structured than the professional occupations. Both systems establish "institutionally defined roles" so individuals know how to act in given situations and others know what to expect from them. There are "set limits beyond which variations [in behaviour] are not permissible" and "corrective forces" are in place to address deviance ([1940] 1954:54). Indeed, the invasion of commercialism in medicine has much in common with "'dishonest' and 'shady' practices in business" ([1939] 1954:45). Both reflect a breakdown in the (ideal) reward systems, placing individuals in a conflict between achievement and broadly held social values.

Finally, the concept of self-interest is in itself vacant. It suggests nothing in terms of concrete behaviour or social outcomes without specifying the institutional environment. "It is precisely around social institutions that... the content of self-interest is organized." Institutions transform the "almost random potentialities" of self-interest into "a coherent system" of interaction and exchange. Both the capitalist speculator and the diligent physician are pursuing an egoistic goal of success. But "the *direction* taken by self-interested activity" is guided by very different rules and expectations ([1940] 1954:62). The aggressiveness of business is a product of its institutions, not self-interest.

In these works, with his analysis of the relationship between self-interest and institutional structure, Parsons is effectively *doing* institutional economics²⁹. However, he had already decided that institutional economics was not to be his career path.

When Parsons first presented the *Structure of Social Action* thesis at a conference, "there was considerable discussion of why [he] did not identify with economics as a discipline" (Parsons 1970:834). Indeed, it was hardly clear at the time why his work was "sociology" rather than (institutional) "economics." Max Weber, for example, was still at this time considered an economist. Frank Knight, a prominent Chicago economist, was the first to translate Weber into English (Weber 1927). "Weber," furthermore, "*always* presented himself as an economist" (Swedburg 1999:562). It was something of a "coup" to define Weber as a sociologist, which only widened the mystery over Parsons' own choice to distance himself from economics. The most compelling answer seems, as Parsons said, that the "decision had already been made... by my transfer from economics to the new Department of Sociology. In spite of the friendliness of [professors] Taussig, Gay, and Schumpeter, I am quite sure that I could not have counted on a future in economics at Harvard" (Parsons 1970:834).

Parsons openly acknowledged that his division of labour for the social sciences was a product of "the controversy between the orthodox and the institutionalists" (Parsons [1932] 1991:87, note 43). Retrospectively, he wrote that "this view grew out of the 'institutionalist dilemma' as it was posed by the institutionalist movement..." (Parsons and Smelser 1956:5). Very clearly, Parsons' solution to the "institutionalist dilemma" was to put institutional economics inside

²⁹ Parsons' essay on professions, by drawing on Durkheim and Weber, brilliantly articulated and developed an idea that institutionalists had vaguely perceived (for example, Douglas' (1924) paper on "non-commercial incentives in economic life" fumbled with the motivation of inventors

the new borders of sociology. Economic institutions were now “a specifically non-economic factor,” and institutionalism was now sociology.

Parsons also leveled gratuitous attacks against the ‘founder’ of institutional economics, Thorstein Veblen. His comments, however, were limited to brief, superficial, antagonistic remarks that amounted to little more than a public statement of dislike (eg, Parsons 1935:439-41). Indeed, this was mostly a token gesture of conflict. Parsons and the institutionalists did not have any great methodological or even substantive disagreements. As Camic pointed out, the works of the institutionalists could have fit very well in Parsons’ early classic, *The Structure of Social Action* (Camic 1992:431).

Parsons’ tension with the institutionalists was disciplinary rivalry in rather purified form. He came to be the institutionalists’ “semi-enemy” – a label which he playfully embraced in his later correspondence with Walton Hamilton. Parsons sent a copy of his 1934 paper to Hamilton with the attached note: “another blast from the semi-enemy’s camp for your delectation” (Walton H Hamilton Papers. Box J53. Folder 3). Karl Polanyi’s comments, too, are rather interesting. Though Polanyi today is often thought of as an anthropologist, he was a professor of economic history in the Columbia economics faculty and a close member of the institutionalist circle. Writing to an institutionalist colleague, Polanyi refers to Parsons as “our friend and opponent” (Carter Goodrich Papers. Box 3: General Correspondence L–Z. Karl Polanyi Folder)³⁰. This seems an apt description. The mixture of substantive agreement and disciplinary rivalry reverberates throughout Parsons’ relations with the institutionalists.

and academics).

³⁰ It is interesting to point out that, while in the US, Polanyi identified himself with institutional economics rather than sociology, though the “new” economic sociology has since claimed him as a central “forefather” (Granovetter 1985).

Sociology – once a key source of theoretical insight for institutionalism – now held a threatening, imperialist air to it. And the aversion to advancements in sociology bled institutionalism of a key source of theoretical development. By the mid-1940s, the neoclassical backlash against institutionalism was more or less complete. “For a period from the late 1940s to about 1970, institutions became an almost prohibited subject within the mainstream of economics” (Rutherford 2001:186). And while institutionalism’s popular demise stemmed from a number of causes, failure to elaborate and develop its ideas was certainly one of them (Rutherford 1997). And this, at least in part, stemmed from a failure to recover from the Parsons offensive – from its tactical inability to draw on leading European socio-economic theorists. Institutionalism, as distinctive school of thought in economics, had defined itself in part by its sociological foundations. After the clash with Parsons, this identity had become a weakness for institutionalism’s professional standing within economics.

However, neither Robbins nor Parsons actually advocated the division of labour between economics and sociology that ultimately took place. Despite Robbins, economics did not really become a general science of choice³¹. Economics long continued to limit itself to the study of the economy, even though both Parsons and Robbins had specifically invited the economic analysis of non-economic life (Robbins 1946:17; Parsons 1934). The term “economics”, for both Robbins and Parsons, implied *economizing* behaviour, rather than the study of the economy. Yet, it was not until the 1970s that Gary Becker’s work succeeded in making ‘the economics of society’ a respectable field in the discipline (Becker 1976). Indeed, when Becker’s first book *The Economics of*

³¹ For one, in macroeconomics, Keynesian analysis was a study of aggregates, separate from methodological individualism, with no real place for individuals or their choices.

Discrimination (1957) was published, a reviewer from sociology found it interesting but saw little future in the project:

Certain social problems... have long been regarded as the special province of sociologists, and economists, for reasons which need not be noted here, are likely to respect rather than assail this tradition. (Schuessler 1958:108)

The postwar division of labour was a sort of tacit coordination. It emerged because it was convenient, not because it made logical sense or could be justified by good (ie, *intellectual*) reasons. Academic authors need to position their work in clear relation to their discipline. A simple, unreflective separation of disciplines, based on obvious departments of social life, served the purpose well. Becker's sociological reviewer captures the spirit very well: there are territorial lines that are to be respected, "for reasons which need not be noted" (Schuessler 1958:108).

The study of the institutions of capitalism suffered a similar fate of post-war obscurity. By the end of WWII, institutionalism had been purged from American economics (Rutherford 2001). Writing in the late 1950s, Parsons suggested that sociology had indeed stepped in to fill the void. "To economists... [sociology] provides a better understanding of 'institutional' factors" than is "readily available" within their own discipline (Parsons 1959a:553). Yet, this is true only in a minimal sense. While post-war sociology was heavily focused on the study of institutions, it was not principally concerned with those of an economic type. Parsons own work grew increasingly abstract, becoming a grand theory of social systems (Parsons 1951). His work on professions was taken up, but mostly as a particularistic aspect of social life, disconnected from broader issues (a reversal of Parsons' emphasis). The field of industrial sociology bred a sizable body of work, but again was detached from the core of both economic

and sociological theory and rested on a "seat-of-the-pants inductivism" (Granovetter 1990:92). A related study of bureaucracy and formal organization has been a mainstay of post-war sociology, almost to the point that the discipline has grown tired of the subject (Collins 1999:31). But it was deliberately broader than the study of business form, and rarely seemed to speak to the nature of capitalism, economic performance, or the orthodox economic interpretation of markets. The overall picture is one of many threads of economic sociology weaving in different directions and lacking any serious integrative efforts. There was very little interest in collaborating – or even competing – with economics to formulate an overall image of modern capitalism. There was not a "division of labour," with its suggestions of joint production. There was simply a division.

Thus, there were two major programs of research more or less excluded from postwar social science: rational choice theories of society and institutional theories of the economy. These were, to borrow from Mancur Olson, big bills left on the sidewalk. They constituted vacant lots between the disciplines, which have only recently been gentrified by attention from prominent social and economic theorists. One can certainly speak of a Robbins/Parsons division of labour in the social sciences, for their programs were specific and complimentary. But their program was not the one accepted. Indeed, the recent turbulence in social science – the rise of an economics of the "social" and a sociology of the "economic" – is a distinct movement towards the actual Robbins/Parsons script.

5.3 ENTRENCHMENT: THE RISE OF MATHEMATICAL ECONOMICS

From the beginnings of sociology in the US, methodological collaboration – mutual commitment to statistical research – was an important part of the unity

of the two disciplines. Beginning in WWI, an infrastructure for large-scale data collection, necessitated by the wartime socioeconomic controls, allowed for major advancements in statistical research. Particularly for economics and sociology, this was an impetus for a major joint project. In later years, however, there was a strong divergence of method in economics and sociology: the mathematical revolution.

In the early years of American economics, mathematics seemed appealing but few knew what to do with it. Baumol, for example, observed that when algebraic symbols appeared in early texts, they often took the form of "a man, M, walked his dog, D" (1985:9). Such displays merely indicated that letters could represent words. The "algebra" does not actually do anything (such as specify a relationship). In any event, there was a "paucity of the use of diagrams and [a] virtual absence of algebra in the journals and textbooks before World War I" (Baumol 1985:8).

A study of the leading American economics journals found that even in 1930, only 20% of theoretical papers involved the use of algebra. However, over the next three decades years mathematics spread rapidly and by 1960 some 80% of theory papers used formal algebraic models (Backhouse 1998:92). A review of the journals in 1980 noted that, on average, almost every second page featured several mathematical equations (Baumol 1985:8). Economics had become a system of thought written almost entirely in algebraic form.

The breakthrough for mathematical economics can be traced back to two key publications. The first, in 1946, was Paul Samuelson's text, *Foundations of Economics*, written while he was still in graduate school. In form, it is difficult to distinguish from a modern undergraduate calculus text. The twin pillars of the methodology were (1) eliminate as many variables as possible, and (2) describe

whatever remained as a constrained optimization problem. Thus fashioned was the core of modern economic methodology. The second blockbuster was Arrow and Debreu's paper, *Existence of an Equilibrium for a Competitive Economy* (1954). Ultimately, it was "an algorithm for solving a set of simultaneous equations" (Blaug 1999:265). Arrow himself has since called it "purely a mathematical construct" (1994:5). But it gave a logical proof of the fundamental theorem of welfare economics – that a competitive market is "efficient."

The works of Samuelson and Arrow-Debreu "might as well have been written in Sanskrit for all the incomprehension with which they were received by the older generation of pre-war economists" (Blaug 1999:257). But these authors did not offer substance – new perspectives that would reshape the discipline. Rather, they furnished things already known with a new technical complexity.

With the rewriting of the methodology of American economics, the academic hierarchy was similarly reshaped. A sort of 'reverse seniority' system now exists. Economists find their technical skills – their "human capital" – depreciates steadily after graduation. In economics, the young have the most advanced technical skills, conduct the most 'cutting edge' research, and ascend the career hierarchy most rapidly. Advanced mathematics holds the power to confuse and intimidate not only outsiders, but also more senior economists who rarely stay abreast of the latest technical advancements (Johnson 1971).

Having established a career path in which mathematical talent is so rewarded, the discipline suffers from a competitive inflation of "rigour". Mathematical sophistication has, at least to some degree, become a disciplinary treadmill.

A survey of PhD students in economics gives a sense of what has been sacrificed in the process. Students were asked what abilities they thought were

most important for their career advancement. Ranking second-last was "a broad knowledge of the economics literature" (6th out of 7 choices). Ranking last was "a thorough knowledge of the economy" (Colander and Klamer 1987:100).

In short, by the late 1940s, economics was well on its way to becoming more or less exactly what sociology was not. Before long, there was little left in economics that sociologists could relate to, elaborate upon, or even contradict. And particularly in economics, knowledge of other social sciences was becoming more than anything a distraction from one's technical research³².

6. Conclusion: Eras and Systems of Academic Professions

There were three eras of interdisciplinary relations between economics and sociology: sponsorship, collaboration, and disengagement. The task of this paper has been to both describe and explain this evolving relation between the two professions.

The first generation of American sociology was immersed in economic questions, a product of its two foundational influences. From England, the works of Herbert Spencer brought an economics writ large, built around the concepts of division of labour and market competition. From Germany, where so many Americans sought advanced study, there came a tradition of historical (and critical) study of capitalist institutions. American sociology began with the task of

³² The increasingly abstract nature of economic theory, after a couple of generations, made it easy to forget that the framework was supposed to refer to the economy. A 'firm' had been reduced to a mathematical equation – a production function specifying the relationship between inputs and outputs. At this level, just about anything could be considered a firm, be it a courthouse, a church, a political party, or a family. Economists eventually re-entered sociological and institutional territory with the confidence that the whole structure of neoclassical theory stood behind them, and with a sense that mucking about in the empirical details of social life was unnecessary.

understanding the socio-economic changes brought on by the industrial revolution.

This was the seed for the era of sponsorship. The first generation of sociologists found a professional home in the American Economic Association. Here, their studies were encouraged, papers were presented, networks took shape, and reputations established.

At Chicago, where sociology staged its dramatic entrance into the university system, sociology was established independently of economics. However, this was in spite of the efforts of the department head, who was trained in German historical economics and who sought to recruit leading economists into the sociology program. Soon after Chicago, sociology took root in a wave of major centers for social science, including Columbia, Harvard, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. In each case, sociology was introduced in the department of economics. As late as 1909, more than half of the 170 universities teaching sociology provided this instruction in the economics department. During this time, "social economics / industrial sociology" was the leading field area for sociology courses, and economics was the most frequently required prerequisite to the study of sociology. The imagery of the early years is of sociology as a young sibling under the wing of economics. This was the era of sponsorship, stretching from the 1880s until the formation of the American Sociological Society.

The era of collaboration emerged as sociology established itself more firmly as an autonomous academic profession. When the American Sociological Society was formed, the debated turned on whether to create a separate organization or to simply organize themselves as a section of the AEA. More than half of the founding membership was from the AEA, and formal separation from

the AEA was balanced by an insistence on joint annual meetings. Over the next three decades, there were only six years in which economists did not have an official place at the annual gathering of sociologists. There were joint presidential addresses of the ASS and the AEA, on average, every second year.

By the early 1940s, joint professional meetings had ground to a halt. The long-term trend of building separate sociology departments peaked in the 1920s and had more or less reached completion by the beginning of WWII. After two or three generations of professionally trained sociologists, there were few left who held a membership in the AEA. This was the era of disengagement, during which the traditional infrastructure of interdisciplinary contact broke down.

Economics was narrowing its field of study and its range of acceptable research methods. Sociologists showed interest in having more annual meetings 'by themselves.' Both fields – though especially economics – had a growing sense that interdisciplinarity was more of a distraction than an opportunity. It had been a 70-year traverse from sponsorship to disengagement.

Interdisciplinary work is not simply a matter of general intellectual curiosity. Like the disciplines themselves, interdisciplinarity needs a career path to draw in serious practitioners. There have been two central factors that have both built up and closed off careers of interdisciplinarity.

The first factor is social science methodology. A shared methodological foundation provides practitioners with a way to understand and interpret their own work in relation to that of others, a basis upon which to recognize merit, and an incentive to stay abreast of new "research technology" regardless of its resident discipline.

During the First World War, the expansion of government controls and wartime administrative bureaus sparked new demand for statistical knowledge.

The war effort became an important employer for statistical researchers in both economics and sociology, providing a new resource base for large scale data collection. After the war, statisticians emerged with a sense that they were building a new foundation for social science. Towering figures such as William Ogburn in sociology and Wesley Mitchell in economics largely captured the Social Science Research Council, jointly led high profile projects such as the President's Committee on Social Trends, and served as presidents of the American Statistical Association (as well as their own professional groups, the ASS and the AEA). For decades, a shared methodological program was a key impetus for collaboration between the disciplines.

The Second World War fed into a different sort of methodological revolution. Economists were recruited to work on military "operations research," employing sophisticated mathematical and statistical forecasting models. Sociologists were also drawn into military strategy research during WWII. However, their work was largely related to soldier morale, employing the well-established methods of social surveys. The wartime mathematical formalism was not an adventure that sociologists joined in.

The neoclassical wing of economics had charted substantial explorations of mathematical formalism in the 1930s, but it was during and after WWII that the approach captured widespread enthusiasm in economics. Indeed, among the leading American economics journals, formal algebraic models appeared in only a fraction (20%) of the theoretical papers in 1930. Over the next few decades, mathematical modeling rapidly achieved dominance; by 1960, some 80% of theoretical papers were written in algebraic form. The drift of economics into mathematical formalism opened a wide methodological chasm in the post-war

era. In a very literal sense, economists and sociologists came to speak different languages.

The disciplinary structure of ideas and theories – conceptions of the world, analytical problems to be solved, and the like – has played no less of a role than methodology in the relations between economics and sociology. In economics, schools that competed with the “orthodox” classical and neoclassical approaches tended to distinguish their movements by appealing to broader social science. Both the German historical and the American institutionalist schools made a sociological orientation part of their identity. Thus, their professional project – building up their respectability in the academic world – contained a strong incentive to interact with sociology and follow new developments in the field.

German historical economics held great influence on both economics and sociology in the early years of American social science. By the second generation, the German approach had mixed with the work of Veblen, as well as the sociological work of Cooley and Ross, and came to be known as institutional economics. Regardless of name, up until WWII there was in economics a prominent school that defined itself in part by interdisciplinarity.

In the 1930s, institutionalism came under attack from two sides – neoclassical economics and sociology. From the neoclassical side, Lionel Robbins argued that the institutionalist perspective was “out of place in a scientific explanation”. Talcott Parsons, for his part, simply argued that the institutions of capitalism were a “specifically non-economic factor,” properly the subject matter of sociology. Either way, the message was the same: institutionalism was not economics.

Among institutional economists, Parsons came to be seen, variously, as their “friend and opponent,” their “semi-enemy,” and so forth – terms that well

capture the mix of conceptual agreement and disciplinary rivalry between the two camps. This new rivalry made it increasingly difficult for those in economics to draw on leading works in sociology – material that had long been a key source of insight for institutional economists. This was part of the downfall of the institutional school, and it supported the retreat of economics into the technical study of prices and quantities.

For more than half a century, internal rivalry within American economics brought much of the discipline into close relations with sociology. It was largely this dynamic that carried sociology into the American university system. But in the end, it became tempting for sociologists to claim a large portion of economics as their rightful terrain, undermining the breadth of the economics discipline. The irony is that the contested territory – the institutional structure of capitalism – was ultimately abandoned by both disciplines. Standing as an awkward middle ground between unfriendly professions, theorists tread cautiously, if at all, in these parts for at least a quarter of a century.

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