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The Matter of Habit¹

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This article is a historical investigation of the concept of habit in sociology. Beginning with the claim that historians of sociology need to look beyond the now-famous ideas that appear in the foreground of the works of the sociological masters, the article examines the neglected idea of habit to document that this concept was long a staple term in the conceptual vocabulary of Western social theorists and that it continued to function as a major background factor in the substantive writings of both Émile Durkheim and Max Weber—a factor that previous scholarship on Durkheim and Weber has almost completely overlooked. It is shown that Durkheim viewed habit not only as a chief determinant of human action in a great variety of areas but also as one of the principal supports for the moral fabric of modern societies. Similarly, habit is found to be significant in Weber's treatment of modern economic and political life, Calvinism and the spirit of capitalism, and the force of traditionalism, which is so central a factor in his framework for comparative-historical analysis. Although the idea of habit was also used extensively in American sociology down to around 1918, in the course of the two decades that followed the concept was purposefully excised from the conceptual structure of the field. This dramatic change is shown to be a result of the interdisciplinary disputes that surrounded the institutionalization of sociology as an academic

AUTHOR'S NOTE.—To make it possible to provide the relatively large amount of primary source documentation that appears in this article, two space-saving measures have been employed. First, in a number of instances, quotations are reported with words or short phrases enclosed within square brackets, the enclosed material representing an effort on my part to render concisely yet faithfully points that are formulated in a less abbreviated way by the original authors. Second, when reporting the dates of the sources cited, the text gives only the year of original publication (or the original date of delivery in the case of lecture courses). Information about the particular editions that I have used is contained in the list of references. Page citations refer to those editions.

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discipline, particularly sociology's struggles with behaviorist psychology, which had by then projected into prominence a notion of habit deriving from 19th-century biological thought. The analysis suggests that the concept of habit was a casualty of sociology's revolt against behaviorism—a casualty whose effects are still to be seen.

On its earthly course an idea always and everywhere operates in opposition to its original meaning and thereby destroys itself. [Max Weber, as reported by Marianne Weber (1926, p. 337)]

Through a case study of the changing role of the concept of habit in sociological thought, this article examines the general question of how the underlying conceptual structure of intellectual fields takes shape over time. The analysis is an effort to trace the idea of habit back to the period when it was a standard and valued item in the conceptual idiom of modern social theorists; to demonstrate that Émile Durkheim and Max Weber both used the concept extensively when confronting the central problems that organize their sociologies; and then to provide a sociological explanation for the demise of habit in the work of such American sociologists as W. I. Thomas, Robert Park, Ellsworth Faris, and Talcott Parsons. In the course of treating these issues, the essay seeks as well to illustrate the value of investigating the history of sociology by looking beyond the particular ideas that occupy the foreground of established sociological classics.

The rationale for choosing the concept of habit as the focus of this case study is rooted in the very fact that contemporary sociology has virtually dispensed with the concept. There is no article on habit in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, no place for it in recent indices of the major sociological journals, and no slot for it in the annual reviews and the standard textbooks. What prevails instead (insofar as claims are made about human conduct in the social world) is a model of action that has alternatively been called purposive, rational, voluntaristic, or decisional but will here be designated by the less controverted term "reflective." According to this widely utilized model, action is a process arising from various utilitarian, moral, affectual, or other motives—motives formed of calculation, belief, attitude, and sentiment—that define ends that an actor then intentionally pursues by choosing, from among available alternatives, the means that appear most appropriate when judged by norms of efficiency, duty, familiarity, and so on. Thus, in a recent attempt to integrate work on the general theory of action, Alexander dismisses notions of "unreflexive action" and avers that "all action . . . inherently involves weighting of means and ends, norms and conditions"; and this conception, he approvingly reports, is one that

currently suffuses sociological “arguments at every theoretical level and of every ideological stripe,” from exchange theory to phenomenology to neo-Marxism (1982*a*, pp. 67–80). Ranging over similar materials, Dawe is likewise pleased to find broad agreement that action involves purposeful agents reflecting over “alternative patterns, alternative sequences, alternative possibilities” (1978, pp. 379, 413). With less satisfaction, Stryker observes in symbolic interactionism as well an emphasis on “reflexivity as the essence of the human condition, [at the expense of] a serious consideration of habit” (1980, p. 152). A kindred view has been adopted even by theorists such as Collins, who combine the insights of ethnomethodologists and sociologists of emotion to criticize sociology for its “rationalist models of cognition and decision-making” but then bring back a less wooden kind of reflective action by proposing that the “structures of the social world” rest on “continuous monitoring” and “self-interested maneuver” by acting individuals (1981, pp. 985, 996, 1012).

So obviously appropriate has the reflective model come to appear that those who employ it seldom concern themselves with providing a reasoned defense, or even an explicit justification, for their practice of uniformly casting human conduct into this one mold. That the process of action might be modeled differently, and was in fact modeled differently by some of the so-called masters of sociological thought, has generally passed altogether unnoticed. And for the persistence of such parochial innocence, scholars writing on sociology’s past bear considerable responsibility. Placing an overly narrow interpretation on the demand that historical research be relevant to the present, these scholars have channeled too much of their effort toward extracting from the standard classics of sociology those insights that are seemingly most pertinent to questions of current sociological interest. To do this, however, is simply to endorse current ways of approaching the social world: it is not to take issue with those ways and to question the present about the limitations of its *overall* approach. If research on the history of sociology is to contribute to the present in this latter and larger sense, it must, as much as possible, bracket the immediate concerns of contemporary practitioners of sociology and strive to understand the ideas of the past in their own terms, since these are the only terms in which lapsed alternatives to entrenched present-day perspectives actually disclose themselves to us. The whole matter of habit is one such lapsed alternative.

METHODOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

The suggestion that the student of past ideas should seek to understand those ideas in their own terms is not, of course, an original one. The same basic argument has been forcefully put forth by scholars in other fields

(see Gunnell 1978; Skinner 1969; Stocking 1968), and historians of sociology have recently sounded the same note in growing numbers (see Collini 1978; Jones 1977; Simonds 1978), thus issuing a call for a "new history of sociology" (Jones 1983). To date, however, the preachments of this emerging field have inevitably outrun its accomplishments, as a result of which the whole approach has come under mounting criticism (see Gerstein 1983; Seidman 1983; Turner 1983).

One wonders, though, whether the new historiography would not be more convincing if it worked to carry out its revolt against "presentism"—the practice of reading the past through the filter of the present—in a more thoroughgoing way. Thus far, too many of the new historians' efforts have been spent traversing the same territories that their more presentist adversaries have charted. One consequence of this has been their reluctance to move much beyond the well-established, classic sociological thinkers (the Marxes, the Durkheims, the Webers), even though it is by highly presentist standards that these thinkers have been elevated into the classical pantheon (see Camic 1979, 1981). A further, more subtle consequence of the lingering presentism has been the tendency when dealing with classic figures to concentrate on the issues that are in the *foreground* of their writings—the very issues that made these writings, not those of others, stand out to the present in the first place—rather than on the themes, concepts, and ideas that remain largely in the *background* (see Polanyi's distinction between "focal" and "subsidiary" awareness [1958, pp. 55–57]).

By narrowing the focus to classic thinkers and then to foreground issues, even antipresentist historians of sociology have provided a severely truncated picture of social theories past. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that basic changes in the conceptual framework of sociology have gone largely unstudied or that habit in particular has received little attention in previous scholarship on sociology's past. In fact, not only has this scholarship neglected almost entirely those episodes in the development of habit that fall outside the classics, it has failed to appreciate the place of the idea even in the amply studied works of Durkheim and Weber. Hence, to take only the most recent example, Alexander declares that Durkheim was done with the notion of habit prior to his first book (Alexander 1982*b*, pp. 108–28) and that for Weber the concept was merely "a residual category," reducible to action motivated by affects and values (Alexander 1983, p. 152, n. 36). The evidence marshaled below makes such pronouncements extremely doubtful; and there have been a few scholars who have come somewhat nearer the mark, notably Roth (1968), Wallwork (1972), and Cohen, Hazelrigg, and Pope (1975). But the fact that the role of habit in the thought of Durkheim and Weber

has yet to be sufficiently brought out offers a striking indication of the extent of the practice of overlooking ramifying ideas in the background of their writings in the course of going over and over the standard foreground topics. What has been missed, as a consequence, is the very kind of developmental process that the historian of sociology seeks to uncover: the change in underlying conceptual structure that separates us from the age of Durkheim and Weber. It is with the aim of demonstrating that such a change occurred, and not—I should emphasize—in the interest of further overextending a reliance on the classics, that this paper treats Durkheim and Weber at some length, in addition to considering certain important installments in the earlier and later history of habit that are located outside the currently recognized classics of sociology.

It hardly need be said, however, that the student of sociology's past is concerned not only with identifying how the field has changed but also with explaining why it has done so. Accordingly, I will attempt briefly to provide a sociological account for the elimination of habit by American sociologists of the early 20th century. In doing so, the analysis will call attention to the intellectual consequences of the widespread concern on the part of those sociologists with securely establishing their field as an autonomous discipline within the universities of the time. In stressing the significance of the factor of institutionalization, my argument is simply following the lead of research in the sociology of science (esp. Ben-David 1971), which has already been instructively applied to the development of sociology in America and elsewhere (Abrams 1968; Clark 1973; Oberschall 1972; Shils 1970). The twist is that, while most of this work focuses on how institutionalization altered "the social-structural aspects of culture production, [but] ignor[es] the content of culture" (Kuklick 1983, p. 300), here the emphasis will be on how the quest for genuine academic autonomy actually did affect the conceptual fabric of sociology. In this regard, I especially want to urge the importance of studying not only what was going on in the sociological literature but also what was taking place in the literature of the disciplines from which sociology was seeking to secure its autonomy. We have all been taught that sociology took shape in opposition to fields such as economics, history, and psychology. But, to date, the real significance of this point has been lost because there has been virtually no effort to divest ourselves of our current images of these fields and to investigate how they were specifically constituted at the time that sociology was first acquiring intellectual form. By examining some of the substantive characteristics of psychology during this decisive period, I hope to take a preliminary step toward correcting this situation.

CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

At this juncture, something should be said about what the concept of habit refers to in this study. At first glance, specifying this may appear problematic, given that the word "habit" (or its French or German equivalent) has been used in a variety of ways by different social thinkers from different ages. Fortunately, however, the core meanings of the term—as the *Oxford English Dictionary* shows—have been fairly constant for many centuries; the variability has exhibited itself chiefly in different loadings onto the common core. The core meaning that is pertinent here stands out most sharply when the previous definition of reflective conduct is recalled, for "habit" ordinarily designates actions that "are relatively unmotivated" (Giddens 1979, p. 218), actions for which "means-ends relations . . . are [from the actor's standpoint] 'not subject to argument' " (Hartmann, 1939, p. 91). Since definitions with "uns" and "nots" may be rather unsatisfying, it is perhaps appropriate to restate these points positively: the term "habit" generally denominates a more or less self-actuating disposition or tendency to engage in a previously adopted or acquired form of action.²

Within this broad definition, certain distinctions can be made. In the first *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Murphy found it convenient, for instance, to differentiate (above the level of "motor habits") "cognitive habits," "emotional habits," and "moral habits" (1932, p. 238). But rather

² Several points of clarification are perhaps in order here. First, the definition just offered is designed to indicate the typical way in which the majority of thinkers included in this study have used habit; it is not a claim about how the term should be used. Second, as the definition indicates, the present analysis is concerned not with the vagaries of the word "habit" but with changing points of view on the phenomenon that the word designates. It happens, though, that in the countries and the period considered in this study, the convention has been actually to refer to the phenomenon of habit by the term "habit" (or its French or German counterpart) (see Funke 1958) so that in only a few cases will it be necessary here to take account of other terminological pointers. Third, while the definition and much of the following discussion are couched in terms of the habits of the individual, it should be noted that most writers on the subject maintain that members of social groups exhibit many common habits. Weber, in fact, employed the separate term "custom" to denote such "collective way[s] of acting" that derive from habit rather than from self-interest or shared norms (1922*a*, p. 319; 1922*b*, p. 187). But this particular usage remains an idiosyncratic one, for, as MacIver once remarked, custom generally refers to collective practices that are backed by a social sanction, "a quality which is in no sense part of the meaning of . . . 'the habits of the group' " (1931, p. 294; see also Tönnies 1909, pp. 35–36). Fourth, the definition leaves open the question of the origins of habit, since space limits preclude taking up this issue. It must suffice to record that the most widespread view has been that habit is produced by repetition: that forms of action that are frequently practiced tend over time to become habitual. Opinions have differed greatly, however, as to how this process of habit formation is actually set into motion.

than place primary emphasis here on this classification according to the content of different habits, it will be helpful for historical purposes to differentiate the various empirical referents of the concept of habit in terms of a dimension that crosscuts the cognitive/emotional/moral classification, namely, whether the “form of action” that is being repeated is simple and circumscribed or generalized and complex. Since this is obviously not a black-and-white issue, it is probably best to envision a long continuum of possibilities. The two end points and the midpoint of this continuum merit separate comment.

To begin at the beginning: habit sometimes refers to the disposition to perform certain relatively elementary and specific activities skillfully. Even in the heyday of the concept of habit, activities of this type rarely attracted the sustained interest of social theorists. The situation has long been otherwise in psychology, however, and in the venerable tradition of William James (1890, p. 107) the modern psychologist equates habit with “sequences of behaviors, usually simple, . . . that have become virtually automatic” and then illustrates the notion with the practice of putting on a left sock before a right one (Lefrançois 1983, p. 393). Still within the lower portion of the habit continuum, but getting beyond the minutiae, one might also locate habits of writing, speaking, perceiving, evaluating, task execution, problem solving, and the like, to which social thinkers have devoted more attention, particularly when discussing the requirements for or impediments to reflective action itself.

But proceeding to what may be looked on as the vast middle range of the continuum, the form of action designated as habit broadens to various more extended lines or more involved patterns of conduct in the social world. Such phenomena were frequently in evidence in the work of social thinkers from the mid-18th to the early 20th century, and in canvassing this work, we will encounter habits of interpersonal interaction; habits of economic, political, religious, and domestic behavior; habits of obedience to rules and to rulers; habits of sacrifice, disinterestedness, and restraint; and so on. This is not to say that those who speak of these kinds of conduct propose that they are uniformly habitual. When the habit label is applied, it is generally to suggest that an action, which may in some situations come about as a motivated actor selects appropriate means to his or her ends, has—in the instance of the actor being described—emerged apart from such a reflective process. That habitual and nonhabitual (reflective or other) considerations may actually be mixed together simultaneously is something no commentator I know of denies. Yet it is only Weber who explicitly conceives of habitual action as a pure type, which concrete cases approach in varying degrees (1922*a*, pp. 25–26)—and this is a formulation that encourages us to appreciate, in many of the allusions by past thinkers to economic, political, religious, domes-

tic, and other habits, an implicit claim for the *preponderance* of the habitual element in a given pattern of action.

In the upper reaches of the habit continuum, one can situate a still-broader usage of the term. According to this usage, habit is the durable and generalized disposition that suffuses a person's action throughout an entire domain of life or, in the extreme instance, throughout all of life—in which case the term comes to mean the whole manner, turn, cast, or mold of the personality. Today the word “character” probably comes closest to evoking this nearly forgotten meaning of habit, although even “character” tends to suggest a system made up of numerous, more specific personality attributes, whereas the point of using habit in its broadest sense is to denote not a sum of parts but a more nearly all-encompassing modality of action that (if one may borrow out of context a vivid formulation from the *Grundrisse*) then assigns rank and influence to other components of the personality.³ Among European thinkers, this distinct conception of habit has often been denoted by leaving the word in its Latin form, *habitus*. This, as we shall see, is a practice that both Durkheim and Weber followed, and it is a practice that Bourdieu has made a notable recent effort at long last to revive (see, e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron 1970).

These definitional preliminaries serve to make one wary of some common stereotypes. To many, the notion of habit immediately conjures up behavior that consists in a fixed, mechanical reaction to particular stimuli and is, as such, devoid of meaning from the actor's point of view. In sociology, this image is one that became fairly widespread early in this century, though it was already current in the 1780s (see Reid 1788, pp. 114–17) and alive during the interim as well. The point to note, though, is that the image has also met with substantial opposition. In place of the idea of a fixed, mechanical reaction to stimuli, it has been held that habit creates a stable inner core that affords immunity from external sensations and impetuous appetites (Ferguson 1792, p. 225; Hegel 1821, p. 260; 1830, p. 144); that it is not by such stimuli as these, but by the ego itself, that habit is called into play and allowed to proceed, with leeway for situational adaptation (Hartmann 1939, p. 88; James 1890, p. 116; Tön-

³ It may, in fact, be helpful to regard the conception of habit under discussion here as the analogue in the personality to the dominant mode of production as seen by Marx: “It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity. It is a particular ether which determines the specific gravity of every being which has materialized within it” (1857, p. 107). The only American writer well known among sociologists to make use of such an idea was John Dewey, who defined habit as that “ordering or systematization of [the more] minor elements of [human] action, which is projective, dynamic in quality, ready for overt manifestation, and [operative] even when not obviously dominating activity” (1922, pp. 40–41; see also Kestenbaum 1977; Petras 1968).

nies 1909, pp. 32–33); and that, however much habitual action may be removed from “hesitation and reflection,” such action is still no more “mechanical” than action of the same type that emerges from wholly reflective processes (Stewart 1792–1827, pp. 54, 55–57). And in place of the claim that habit is devoid of subjective meaning, both phenomenologists and psychoanalysts have proposed that habitual action does exhibit a “meaningful character”—either taken for granted by the actor or lodged in the unconscious (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 53; Hartmann 1939, p. 89; Kestenbaum 1977, pp. 3–4; Schutz 1932, p. 19). I am not suggesting that these views be directly substituted for the stereotype; spokespersons on all sides have been sufficiently reluctant to specify to which instances of habit, and to what extent, their statements apply that caution is mandated all around if one is out for a description of some of the auxiliary features of habitual action. If one is concerned with the history of the concept of habit, however, it is best simply to set stereotypes and counterstereotypes aside from the start and to leave them aside until they become an essential part of the story itself.

HISTORICAL PROLOGUE

To understand the transformation that the concept of habit has undergone in sociology, it is necessary to take notice of certain prior developments that occurred chiefly outside the classics of sociology. The provenance of habit is remote. The notion was already an established one among ancient Greek thinkers, and it thereafter proved resilient, playing a consequential role in the writings of medieval scholastics, reformed theologians, and numerous early modern philosophers and litterateurs (see Burnham 1968*a*, pp. 8–9; Dubray 1905, pp. 17–23; Fuchs 1952; Funke 1958, pp. 32–344; Passmore 1970, pp. 161–62).

During the 18th century, the concept received still more systematic attention (see Funke 1958, pp. 345–496), most conspicuously from a number of the major figures of the Enlightenment. Speaking for many thinkers of the French Enlightenment, Helvétius, for example, proposed that “habit [is a] principle by which [humans everywhere] are actuated” and that it is also the great wellspring of morality, both private and public (1758, pp. 57, 108, 180); as well, Rousseau proclaimed many forms of social inequality “uniquely the work of habit” and held that law should rest on “the force of habit, [rather than on] the force of authority” (1755, p. 138; 1762, p. 81); and Condorcet forecast the progressive transformation of “habits . . . adopted through miscalculation” by “freely contracted habits . . . inspired by nature and acknowledged by reason” (1793, pp. 192, 194). In Scotland, enlighteners such as Hume (1739–40, pp. 104–5, 503–4) and Ferguson (1792, pp. 209–34) expressed similar opinions; and

even cerebral German *Aufklärer* such as Kant insisted on giving habit its due, if only better to master it. In fact, it was Kant's opinion that "all acquired habits are objectionable," that "virtue is moral strength in pursuit of one's duty, a duty which should never be a matter of habit, but should always proceed, fresh and original, from one's mode of thought" (1798, pp. 32, 34). The idea continued to hold its own, moreover, even when reaction to the Enlightenment set in during the early 19th century. Indeed, the concept remained on active duty with thinkers so otherwise at odds as English utilitarians in the mold of James Mill (see Woodcock 1980) and German idealists, including Hegel himself, who postulated that "habit is indispensable for the existence of all intellectual life" (1830, p. 143).

But far-reaching changes were about to engulf the concept of habit. As the preceding quotations may suggest, when thinkers of the 18th and early 19th centuries spoke of habit, they spoke principally at a level of generality that corresponds to the middle range of the habit continuum described above. What increasingly came to the fore in the course of the 19th century, however, was the practice of equating habit more exclusively with activities of a relatively elementary type and then treating these in a manner that led away from the analysis of action in the social world altogether. This transformation was brought on by two developments that occurred near the center stage of European intellectual life.

The first of these was a rapid growth of the biological sciences—chiefly through the efflorescence of evolutionary theory and of experimental physiology. The well-known history of evolutionary theory need not be detailed here, save for one basic item. Habit, it emerges, was a term prominently used by evolutionists when they described the elementary behaviors of lower species. It was in this sense that Lamarck talked of giraffes "brows[ing] on the leaves of trees" and called this their habit, talked of "snakes . . . crawling on the ground" and called this a habit too (cited by Oldroyd 1980, p. 31), and it was in this sense also that Darwin spoke freely in *On the Origin of Species* of such things as the feeding habits of "British insects," the climbing habits of the "larger titmouse," and the flowering habits of "plants when transported [into] another" climate (1859, pp. 11, 183). This same usage loomed still larger when, in his later writing, Darwin hastened from horses' pacing habits, caterpillars' eating habits, and pigeons' flying habits directly to the habits of human beings (1872, pp. 29–31).

Here Darwin's work happened to link up with the physiological literature of the time: a noteworthy body of research that had the effect of confirming the equation between habit and elementary behavior and driving the phenomenon entirely out of the social world and into the recesses of the biophysical sciences (on this research, see Liddell 1960;

Thomson 1968, pp. 37–53; Young 1970). This effect came about as physiologists were drawn, by their interest in the movements of decapitated chickens, headless frogs, and the like, to the experimental study of “reflex actions,” which were conceived as motor responses activated by nerve cells excited by stimuli external to a given organism (see Fearing 1930). This is significant, for to view reflex actions in this way was also to physiologize the concept of habit thoroughly because the physiological literature had long since adopted habit as the standard synonym for acquired reflexes (Burnham 1968*a*, p. 52; Fearing 1930). More significantly still, physiologists showed little hesitation in extending to human beings what was said about the chickens and the frogs. Humans, after all, exhibited acquired motor reflexes or habits too, and much—if not all—of human action might, by extrapolation, be reduced to tendencies of the nervous system “to grow to the modes in which it has been habitually exercised” (as the English physiologist Carpenter put it in the 1870s; see Danziger 1982, p. 130).

What made this seemingly esoteric usage consequential was its coincidence with a second major development: the gradual emergence of the science of psychology. Prior to the 19th century, psychological speculation was something generally carried out by philosophers engaged in rather unspecialized inquiries. Thereafter, however, as the era of intellectual differentiation set in, students of the mind sought greater autonomy for their field, and by the last quarter of the 19th century their efforts began to pay off. Not only did psychology manage, ahead of many other fledgling specialities of the time, to establish itself as a recognized field in the universities, especially in Germany (see Ben-David and Collins 1966; Ross 1967; Woodward 1982), but even when the academic linkages still left much to be desired, there was an impressive outpouring of research concerned with the “sensations, images and feelings . . . out of which complex states of mind were built up” (Thomson 1968, p. 89; in general, see Boring 1957; Hearnshaw 1964; Thomson 1968; Watson 1968).

This “new psychology,” as it was often called, was on the whole almost militantly scientific. Perhaps as a result of a still “low-status field[’s] attempt to upgrade [itself] by borrowing the methods of a high-status field” (Ben-David and Collins 1966, p. 460), 19th-century psychology leaned heavily on the achievements of the biological sciences, particularly evolutionism and, above all, physiological experimentalism (see Murphy and Kovach 1972, pp. 65–75, 126–47; Thomson 1968, pp. 92–124, 168–73). Habit was depicted accordingly. What reliably appeared in recurring psychological discussions of the subject was the idea of habit as a phenomenon belonging among the primary processes of the (human) organism (see Andrews 1903, pp. 122–27; Dubray 1905, pp. 64–73; Fearing 1930, p. 239; James 1890, pp. 104–27). It was thus that Bain equated

habit with reflex action and a “narrowing of the sphere of influence of a sensational or active stimulus [to] one solitary channel [in] the cerebral system” (1859, pp. 11–12); and it was thus too that Dumont discussed how “the impressions of outer objects fashion for themselves in the nervous system more and more appropriate paths” and then proposed that these well-fashioned neural pathways are our habits (1876, p. 324; translation by James 1890, p. 106).

This distinctive conceptualization of habit was to be triumphant, but the triumph still lay abroad in America. In late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe, the new psychologists’ views, widely aired though they were, never held the intellectual field unchallenged, for the field was already rich in more traditional statements about habit. Hence, when used in social-scientific discourse, the concept tended to retain the same basic character it had had prior to the changes just enumerated. One can see this in writings as diverse as those of Bagehot (1872, p. 9; 1879, pp. 141–64) and Bradley and Bosanquet (Collini 1978, pp. 12–14) in Britain (cf. Spencer 1855, pp. 525–30); Comte (1830–54, pp. 235, 253, *passim*) and LePlay (1855–81, pp. 139, 143, *passim*) in France; and Jhering (1883, 2:239–47), Tönnies (1887, pp. 33–170; 1909), Simmel (1900), Vierkandt (1908, pp. 103–9), and Lederer (1918–19) in Germany. It is true that in none of this work did habit exhaust the domain of action. More reflective types of conduct were consistently on the scene as well. But these did not yet stand alone—and this is the point. Despite the efforts of biologists, physiologists, and psychologists to carry habit off in other directions, it remained a standard term by which social theorists captured those forms of action in the social world that were seen to be less reflective and more self-actuating. It was in this context that Émile Durkheim and Max Weber wrote.

HABIT IN CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY

Durkheim

Habit was well exercised by Durkheim, and it was exercised throughout much of his career, even as he underwent, according to at least some scholars, certain far-reaching theoretical changes. The concept was, to be sure, rarely at the forefront of his attentions, and all those who see only the forefront have accordingly glossed over it altogether. But, however little the term may mean to contemporary commentators, it was nonetheless a tool in *Durkheim’s* conceptual toolbox, one that he brought out and put to work on the most varied occasions.

Some scattered illustrations may introduce the point. Take, for instance, Durkheim’s observations on the empirical role of habit at different

points in the evolutionary process. Primitive peoples, in his judgment, live to a large extent by the “force of habit” and under the “yoke of habit” (1893, p. 159; 1912, p. 103), for “when things go on happening in the same way, habit . . . suffice[s] for conduct” and moral behavior itself is easily transformed “into habit mechanically carried out” (1898–1900, p. 90; 1902–3*b*, p. 52). Much the same was true, he claimed, in advanced cities of the Middle Ages, where “habit has . . . dominion over people and over things without any counter-balance” (1898–1900, p. 38). Neither do modern societies dispense with it. A social order based on the division of labor, Durkheim maintained, requires “more and more intensive and assiduous work, and [such work becomes] habitual”—and habitual in a particular way, since “civilization . . . imposes upon man monotonous and continuous labor, [which] implies an absolute regularity in habits” (1893, p. 242; 1902–3*b*, p. 70, m.t.; 1902–3*a*, p. 80).⁴ Thus, for “a worker . . . to take his place in society, [he must develop] the habit of exerting himself” and other “habits of work” that were simply unknown among the torpid primitives (1902–3*b*, pp. 173, 181; the general argument here bears comparison with that of E. P. Thompson [1967]).

Habit was a recurrent factor, too, in Durkheim’s analysis of suicide: “habits of passive obedience, of absolute submission, of impersonalism” increase the suicide rate among military officers, he asserted, whereas “the habit of domestic solidarity” decreases the rate within various other populations (1897*b*, p. 238; 1888*c*, p. 234). The concept was also in operation in certain discussions of the development of collective representations. In his earliest writings, Durkheim proposed that religion itself first emerges as a “theory to explain and make sense of [everyday] habits,” and in subsequent work he held that the “ideas and reasons which develop in our consciousness [arise, inter alia, from] ingrained habits of which we are unaware” (1887*a*, p. 35; 1897*a*, p. 168). And his speculations on social and cultural change repeatedly harked back to habit, which he viewed as one of the greatest impediments to progress of any sort. “It is always a laborious operation to pull up the roots of habits that time has fixed and organized in us” (1893, p. 241); operating outside the “sphere of the clear consciousness, . . . habits . . . resist any change [since] what cannot be seen is not easily modified” (1898–1900, p. 84). Hence, Durkheim lamented, many social facts “continue . . . to exist merely through force of habit,” among them antiquated penal, educational, and

⁴ “M.t.” within a citation indicates that I have slightly modified the English translation of the cited passage to preserve something about habit that has been lost in the translation—and this very often is the concept of habit itself. In such cases, a reference to the translation will appear first, followed by a cross-reference to the foreign language source.

political institutions and all manner of unscientific ideas that endure because “inveterate habits [of thinking] lead us astray” (1895*b*, p. 120, m.t.; 1895*a*, p. 60; 1898–1900, pp. 60, 99–100; 1899–1900, p. 180; 1902–3*b*, p. 14; 1909, p. 87).

Nor should these formulations be discounted as so many slips of a loose pen. For there are sufficient instances in Durkheim’s writings where the background actually breaks to the foreground to make it clear how much the remarks just quoted correspond with his fully considered opinions on habit. In his last new lecture course, Durkheim brought into the open a fundamental claim that had long been in the recesses of his work (see 1887*a*, p. 34; 1897*b*, pp. 158–59; 1898–1900, p. 90). This was the idea that, by its very nature, human action, whether individual or collective, oscillates between two poles, that of consciousness or reflection on the one side, and that of habit on the other side, with the latter pole being the stronger. Durkheim wrote that as long as “there is an equilibrium between our dispositions and the surrounding environment, [action occurs by] merely skim[ming] over [our] consciousness”; “consciousness and reflection [only awaken] when habit is disrupted, when a process of nonadaptation occurs” (1913–14, pp. 79–80). In this eventuality, where “the [individual or collective] being is . . . at a cross-roads situation,” “faced with a whole range of possible solutions,” reflection—which on other occasions “slows down, overloads or paralyzes action”—comes to the fore, though only to “disappear . . . when it no longer serves [this] purpose” and “habits of all kinds” assert themselves once again (1913–14, pp. 38, 79, 83). But to say this is obviously to imply that most actors proceed most of the time under the sway of their habits: those “inner tendencies” or “internalized forces [which unfold themselves], activated, as it were, spontaneously” (1895*b*, p. 54; 1902–3*b*, p. 28, m.t.; 1902–3*a*, p. 32). And this is precisely the position that Durkheim forthrightly embraced, declaring that “it is not enough to direct our attention to the superficial portion of our consciousness; for the sentiments, the ideas which come to the surface are not, by far, those which have the most influence on our conduct. *What must be reached are the habits*”—“*these are the real forces which govern us*” (1905–6, p. 152 [emphasis added]; see also 1898–1900, p. 80).

So faithful was Durkheim to this viewpoint that—quite aside from the visible part that he assigned to habit in his treatment of primitive society, modern work, suicide, and the like—the phenomenon assumed a vital role in his analysis of the issue that, by all recent accounts, was at the very center of his theoretical and practical efforts: the issue of morality and the moral foundations of modern societies (on the centrality of this issue, see Alexander 1982*b*; Bellah 1973; LaCapra 1972; Lukes 1973; Marks 1974; Wallwork 1972). In overlooking Durkheim’s assessment of habit, what

the Durkheimian scholarship has sacrificed above all else, therefore, is a more adequate understanding of Durkheim's whole approach to the "alarming poverty of morality" in his age (1897*b*, 387); for a good part (though not the whole) of the solution to this predicament was seen by him to lie in the domain of habit.

This becomes particularly evident at three junctures. The first of these is in *The Division of Labor*, where Durkheim maintained that the moral norms necessary to end the crisis of anomie actually would come directly into being with the development of habits of interaction among the specialized parts that constitute the world of divided labor. "There are," he stated, "certain ways in which [differentiated functions] react on one another, which, being more in accordance with the nature of things, are repeated more often and become habits; then the habits, as they acquire force, are transformed into rules of conduct. . . . In other words, a certain selection of rights and duties is made by habitual practice and these end up by becoming obligatory" (1893, p. 366; retranslation by Lukes [1973, p. 164]; see also Durkheim 1886, p. 213; 1887*b*, p. 275; 1888*a*, p. 66; 1898–1900, pp. 7–9; 1902, pp. 14–15; Durkheim and Buisson 1911, p. 153; cf. the criticisms of Lukes [1973, p. 164] and Parsons [1937, p. 321] with the argument of Berger and Luckmann [1966, pp. 53–67]). In his later work on occupational corporations, Durkheim concluded that this first formulation was "incomplete" (1902, p. 4), but he immediately went on to incorporate habit into his plans for moral regeneration in a second way. He urged his celebrated project to revitalize occupational groups in part because he believed such institutions able to create and implant much-needed habits of moral conduct. So long as "the family [provides the only] collective life in which [specialists] participate," they will, Durkheim reasoned, become inured to "the habit of acting like lone wolves" and acquire an "inclination toward a fierce individualism" (1902–3*b*, pp. 233–34). He then posed the problem, "How can we learn the [opposite] habit?"—that of "disinterestedness," "self-forgetfulness," and "sacrifice"? (1902, p. 4). His proposal for occupational corporations followed immediately in direct answer (see 1902, pp. 4–31).

But this was not the only answer, for a third way of pressing habit into service readily suggested itself—the prospect of instilling good moral habits from earliest childhood onward instead of waiting for occupational life to get under way. Durkheim seized upon this possibility with great enthusiasm, and his writings on education indeed constitute perhaps the fullest statement on record of the habitual basis of social morality. It is well known that, in Durkheim's view, modern secular society requires a moral code emphasizing (*a*) group attachment, or devotion to collective ideals; (*b*) regularity, or "behaving similarly under like circumstances"; (*c*) authority, or dutiful submission and self-restraint in accord with obliga-

tory rules; and (d) autonomy, or reflective consciousness concerning ethical principles (see esp. 1902–3*b*, pp. 17–126). What has never been appreciated is the place of habit in this whole affair. But, for Durkheim, certain components of morality are inherently matters of habit: to become attached to collective ideals, “one must have developed the habits of acting and thinking in common”; “to assure regularity, it is only necessary that habits be strongly founded” (1902–3*b*, p. 233, 28, m.t.; 1902–3*a*, p. 32). Furthermore, while something more than habit is required, in his view, to produce submission to rules and reflective consciousness (as we shall see), even this something more develops from the base of early habits, particularly “the habit of self-control and restraint” and “the habit of lucid thought” (1902–3*b*, p. 149; 1904–5, p. 347). This fact, along with the postulate that children are “creature[s] of habit,” led Durkheim to argue that educational institutions could go far in laying the groundwork for *all* elements of his secular morality: by offering the example of common classroom life, the school could “induc[e] in the child the habits of group life” and attachment; by enforcing a regimen of rules and discipline, it could “accustom [the child] to regularity” and “develop . . . the habit of self-control”; and by teaching natural science, it could encourage “the child to acquire wholesome intellectual habits, which will strengthen his moral conduct” (1902–3*b*, pp. 135, 143, 149, 249, 297; see also 1904–5, pp. 275, 318, 331–48). This argument is, in fact, one of the chief reasons that schooling came to play so indispensable a role in Durkheim’s continual efforts at moral reform.

It should be noted, though, that when advancing this position, Durkheim’s focus was principally on primary education (see 1902–3*b*, p. 17). In his analysis of secondary education, a very different spirit seems to be at work. In Durkheim’s judgment, secondary schooling is not, and should not be, a process revolving about “the acquisition of certain specific abilities or habits” (1904–5, p. 30). This contention is an outgrowth of two aspects of his moral theory mentioned, but not elaborated, above: first, his insistence (esp. in his later writings) that insofar as it involves dutiful conformity to rules, morality necessarily transcends habit, since “a rule . . . is not only a habitual means of acting, it is, above all, an obligatory means of acting”—a means of acting that is imperative (1902, p. 4; 1902–3*b*, p. 28; see also 1888*b*, pp. 214–15; 1903–12, p. 649; 1912, p. 482, n. 10; 1920, p. 265, n. 1); second, his belief that, under the dynamic conditions of the modern age, any viable morality entails as well continual reflection at the upper reaches of the social order (1898–1900, pp. 88–94; 1911*a*, p. 84; 1904–5, pp. 315–16).⁵ It was in hopes of fostering these

⁵ Despite this belief, it was Durkheim’s judgment that even persons in professional and managerial positions, which demand constant reflection instead of fixed habits, “be-

obligatory and reflective features of moral life that Durkheim's writings on secondary education set aside the issue of cultivating particular habits of conduct. Moral education, in his view, clearly required more than this.

Yet what the requirement turns out to be comes as a considerable surprise—particularly if we expect Durkheim to propose, like sociologists of today, that reflective conduct in accord with obligatory rules hinges on the transmission of moral beliefs, values, and norms. For this is not at all Durkheim's own position. Making it the task of secondary education to impart "a certain number of true beliefs [and] specific articles of faith" and to "decorat[e the] mind with certain ideas [and] certain formulae" is nearly as inappropriate, he argued, as concentrating at this level on the "contract[ing of] certain specific habits" (1904–5, p. 29). Both possibilities, in his opinion, amount to a reversion to the dubious educational objectives of antiquity, in place of the proper pedagogical program of the Christian Middle Ages, where it was recognized that "if we are truly to do our job as educators and have an effect which will be durable," we must concern ourselves with developing in the individual "a more profound condition which determines the other [specific aspects of personality] and gives them their unity, [namely,] a general disposition of the mind and the will": a "*habitus* of moral being" (1904–5, pp. 28–29; see also 1902–3*b*, p. 21). Here, as habit in the most generalized sense is elevated over all more specific usages, Durkheim vindicated his faith in the transformative moral power of educational institutions. It was his conviction that the Christian conception of the mission of education was theoretically the correct one; were modern secondary schools only to work to create a dutiful and reflective secular *habitus* to replace the religious *habitus* of the past, the exacting moral demands of the contemporary age might yet be well satisfied (1904–5, pp. 30, 317).

If this sprawling account by Durkheim of the vital interplay between the habitual and the moral attests further to the fact that the ancient concept of habit was still alive and well in his work, there remains an illuminating exception to this conclusion. The concept is all but absent from Durkheim's frequent and fervent programmatic statements on the field of sociology itself (see 1888*a*, 1890, 1892, 1895*b*, 1898*b*, 1899, 1900*a*, 1900*b*, 1901, 1901–2, 1908*a*, 1908*b*, 1909, 1915). The omission bears witness, I would suggest, to the subtle ways in which the conceptual

have in [nonwork] contexts as simple persons acting by routine, who neither think nor act otherwise than the ignorant populace" (1904–5, pp. 315–16; 1905–6, p. 138). It should be noted, moreover, that the objective of the type of reflection Durkheim advocated is not to dislodge habits but to "maintain them in the state of necessary adaptability and flexibility" (1905–6, p. 137).

structure of sociological thought has been shaped through the apparently peripheral movement to institutionalize the discipline of sociology.

Durkheim's programmatic statements were, after all, integral to what Lukes has described as a lifelong "campaign to win recognition for sociology's scientific status" in an ossified academic environment extremely reluctant to concede the scientific legitimacy of the new field (Lukes 1973, p. 36; see also Clark 1973; Shils 1970). It was Durkheim's conviction, furthermore, that the legitimacy of a would-be science could be securely grounded only when "its subject matter is an order of facts which other sciences do not study" (1895*b*, p. 162). Differentiating sociology from the more established field of individual psychology thus became an issue of cardinal concern to him. This, of course, is a point that previous commentators have often recorded, albeit in such general terms that Durkheim's encounter with psychology emerges as a struggle with an almost faceless opponent. In fact, however, the enemy was an eminently full-bodied one: chiefly, it was the aggressive "new psychology" of the time. When Durkheim described psychology, he spoke of research on "the organic and physical constitution of man" (1900*a*, p. 363); when he adverted to specific psychological writings, it was the English, French, German, and American representatives of the new psychology that he repeatedly cited (see 1898*a*; 1902–3*b*; 1913–14), even drawing on Dumont's psychophysical discussion of "*l'habitude*," which was mentioned above (see 1898*a*, p. 5). Operating against this backdrop and determined to endow sociology with "a subject matter peculiarly its own" (1895*b*, p. 50), Durkheim did not wait long to question which discipline should have custody of habit, and it did not take long for him to answer by explicitly declaring that the phenomenon belonged to psychology (see, e.g., 1888*a*, p. 51; 1901, p. 44; 1911*b*, p. 111). Never mind that, by his own testimony, habits met the same criteria as the "social facts" that were at the core of his sociology: that they were external to the individual in the sense that they were among the tendencies that "education has impressed upon us" (1912, p. 389; see also 1893, p. 320; 1895*b*, pp. 50–54; 1902–3*b*, p. 244; 1904, p. 127) and that they were also constraining, "dominat[ing] us and impos[ing] beliefs and practices upon us" (1901, p. 44). For all this, the idea of habit remained, in Durkheim's mind, too closely associated with psychology to merit inclusion in his sundry pronouncements about what the discipline of sociology ought to study; to make the concept a part of sociology could only risk the whole cause by suggesting that the new field was not such an autonomous one after all. It is true that Durkheim might have stressed the difference between the view of habit that appears elsewhere in his own writings and the physiological notion current in the psychological literature, but it was safer to make a clean break and officially concede this pawn to the psychologists, for sociology had enough

to do in studying those phenomena that possessed the obligatory moral character that habit was now said to lack. And if habit could come to this end with Durkheim—at the same time that he employed the concept throughout his substantive work, held that it described most of the action that goes on in the social world, and made it central to his plans for moral regeneration—its fate could only be worse at the hands of sociologists across the ocean who fell short on much of this and who were embroiled in institutional struggles that appeared more threatening and more urgent.

Weber

Between Durkheim and Weber there is little common ground; in terms of assumptions, problems, and methods, the two were greatly at odds. Yet Weber was easily as inclined as Durkheim to make serious use of habit, though in doing so he ultimately carried the concept along paths that diverged from the moralizing highroad of his French contemporary.⁶

It so happens, however, that to understand Weber's position on habit properly, one must attend not only to his explicit references to habit and its cognates but also to his observations on custom—in the strictly Weberian sense of collective uniformities of action rooted simply in habit (1913, pp. 170–71; 1922*a*, pp. 29, 319–20, 652; 1922*b*, p. 187)—as well as to his use of the special term *Eingestelltheit*. This expression, borrowed by Weber (less its psychophysical trappings) from psychologists such as Kraepelin and Wundt, was employed by him to designate the phenomenon he had in view when speaking of habit, namely, an unreflective, set disposition to engage in actions that have been long practiced (1908–9, pp. 93–94; 1922*b*, pp. 192, 442). Here the word “disposition” will be used as a shorthand for this kind of habitual disposition and thus as the translation for *Eingestelltheit*.⁷

⁶ That Weber steered clear of the moral-reformist path of Durkheim does not mean that he was without his own moral judgments on the value of habitual action. On the contrary, the Weberian “ethic of responsibility,” as Levine has observed, extolled “the freedom of actors to make their own decisions” and enjoined individuals “to be constant in employing correctives against unthinking habit” (1981, p. 20). The difference between this estimate of habit and Durkheim's assessment of the same phenomenon is noteworthy, though an examination of this evaluative discrepancy falls outside the bounds of this article.

⁷ With one evident exception (Roth's translation of Weber 1922*b*, p. 570, in Weber 1922*a*, p. 988), Weber's *Eingestelltheit* has been rendered “attitude,” “attitude-set,” or the like, presumably because of its root in *Einstellung*, which is a modern German equivalent for “attitude.” But it is important to recognize that, in Weber's day, the term “attitude” had yet to gain wide intellectual currency (see Fleming 1967; cf. Bendix 1960, p. 272, n. 24). Indeed, in the psychological literature from which he

If these semantic complications are kept in mind, Weber's views on habit emerge quite clearly. Consider, to start with, his declaration of its "far-reaching economic significance." In Weber's estimate, "the level of economic need, which constitutes the basis of all 'economic activity,' is comprehensively conditioned by mere custom," which plays its part also in determining the means of exchange and the utilization of such basic "economic advantages" as labor and the means of production; furthermore, "the patterns of use and of relationship among [modern] economic units are determined by habit" (1922*a*, pp. 67–68, 78, 89, 320, 335). Work itself, as Weber saw it, rests heavily on a habitual foundation. "The small Polish peasant [succeeds in agriculture] on account of the low level of his physical and intellectual habits of life" (1895, p. 434); "German girls [work inefficiently in factories because of an inner] stone wall of habit" (1904–5*a*, p. 62); the "freedmen [of antiquity] prospered, for they had acquired habits of industry and thrift while slaves" (1909, p. 59). In the modern world, a similar situation obtains within capitalist factories and bureaucratic offices, these institutions being the "offspring" of discipline, which Weber defined as "the probability that *by virtue of habituation* a command will receive prompt and automatic obedience in stereotyped forms" (1922*a*, pp. 53, 1149, 1156 [emphasis added]). Accordingly, his writings on industry discussed at length the replacement of "the 'habits' of the old occupation[s]" by docile habits "in line with the demands of the [factory] work procedure" (1908*b*, p. 130; 1922*a*, p. 1156; see also 1908*b*; 1908–9; 1922*a*, pp. 731, 1155–56), while his analysis of bureaucracy placed great weight on officialdom's "disposition (*Eingestelltheit*) to painstaking obedience [and to the] habitual and virtuoso mastery of a single function" (1922*a*, p. 988, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 570).

By Weber's reckoning, habit is also plainly in operation outside the sphere of work and economic activity. It is there on the battlefields, where successes have been secured as well as "forfeited by [various martial] habits" (1922*a*, p. 1152); there likewise amid processes of group formation, with "mere custom . . . facilitating intermarriage," "the formation of feelings of 'ethnic' identification," and "the creation of community" (1922*a*, p. 320, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 187); and there, too, at the base of modern political-legal orders, where "the broad mass of the participants act in a way corresponding to legal norms, not out of obedience regarded as a legal obligation, but [in a great many cases] merely as a result of

borrowed the word *Eingestelltheit*, *Einstellung* itself was generally without its modern meaning of "attitude"; e.g., Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* (which was compiled in collaboration with two well-placed German scholars, Munsterberg and Groos) officially translates *Einstellung* as "acquired disposition" (see Baldwin 1901, 1:287, 2:679–80).

unreflective habit" (1922*a*, pp. 31, 312, m.t.; 1922*b*, pp. 16, 182; see also 1913, p. 178).

But not only does habit promote conformity with legal (as well as other) norms, it is also involved in the genesis of such norms. In a manner that recalls the early Durkheim, Weber held that "customs are frequently transformed into binding norms, [since] the mere fact of the regular recurrence of certain events somehow confers on them the dignity of oughtness." In other words, "what were originally plain habits of conduct owing to psychological disposition (*Eingestelltheit*), come later to be experienced as binding; then, with the awareness of the diffusion of such conduct among a plurality of individuals, it comes to be incorporated [in] 'expectations' as to the meaningfully corresponding conduct of others; [until finally these expectations] acquire the guaranty of coercive enforcement" (1922*a*, pp. 326, 754, m.t.; 1922*b*, pp. 191, 442).

In remarks such as these, one sees the place of habit in Weber's treatment of processes of change. More typically, however, what Weber stressed was "the inertia of the habitual" (1922*a*, p. 321, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 188). In his judgment, "the inner disposition (*Eingestelltheit*) [to continue along as one has regularly done] contains in itself [such] tangible inhibitions against 'innovations,' [that it is problematic] how anything new can ever arise in this world" (1922*a*, p. 321, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 188). Moreover, he continued, even where "revolts, panics, or other catastrophes" have forcibly introduced changes, the status quo ante has often been restored simply "by an appeal to the conditioned disposition (*Eingestelltheit*) to obedient compliance" on the part of subjects and officials alike (1922*a*, p. 988, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 570).

That Weber thus adverted to the significance of habit in so many important contexts was not happenstance. The examples that have just been mentioned—the majority of them, at any rate—were not incidental comments but reasoned formulations fully in accord with Weber's direct testimony. Not only do we discover, he wrote, "the further we go back in history, . . . that conduct, and particularly social action, is determined in an ever more comprehensive sphere exclusively by the disposition (*Eingestelltheit*) toward the purely habitual" (1922*a*, p. 320, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 188), but we find that "individuals are still markedly influenced by . . . custom even today," so much so that "the great bulk of all everyday action [approaches an] almost automatic reaction to habitual stimuli which guide behavior in a course which has been repeatedly followed" (1922*a*, pp. 25, 337). Despite such testimony, however, the habitual undercurrent in Weber's work has yet to be much appreciated. Fixated on foreground, the burgeoning Weberian scholarship of the past two decades has gone far to dissect Weber's views on rationality, but—aside from the perceptive beginnings of Roth (1968, pp. xxxv, xc, lxix) and Cohen et al.

(1975, pp. 231–33, 239)—habit has been left out of the accounting. This omission is the more peculiar for, in the widely read introductory section of *Economy and Society*, Weber himself pointedly spotlighted the realm of the habitual when he placed “traditional action” among his basic “types of social action,” conceived of this form of conduct as action “determined by ingrained habit,” and then added to this the above-quoted claim that “the great bulk of all everyday action” approximates this type (1922*a*, p. 25, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 12). Students of Weber, nonetheless, have failed to take due heed of this; at best, they have made note of the concept of traditional action, recorded its definition, and then let the matter go (see, e.g., Alexander 1983, p. 25; Aron 1967, p. 221; Giddens 1971, p. 153).

For Weber himself, however, traditional action was by no means a residual category. The fact that this type of action is defined as deriving from “ingrained habit” serves to unite it directly with the very aspect of Weber’s work that has just been considered, that is, his treatment of the marked effect of habit on economic and political life, social stability and change, and a good deal else. Within *Economy and Society* itself, the concept of traditional action is a link, too, to the detailed analysis, which immediately follows the concept’s introduction, of the nature of social and economic relations, for this analysis reverts repeatedly to the role of the traditional—in structuring communal relationships, establishing the expectations that underlie stable organizations, ranking alternative economic ends, canalizing work effort, and so on (1922*a*, pp. 40–41, 49, 88, 129, *passim*). In fact, unless one is to believe that Weber, at his terminologically most precise, altered without warning his definition of traditional, the only fair conclusion is that in all this he was again observing what to him were basically the ramifications of habit.

But even more important, “traditional action” provides a bridge outward to Weber’s vast writings on “traditionalism.” This is a connection that Parsons was the first (and is still among the few) to have discerned, though he then beclouded the issue by recasting Weber’s formulations to fit his own emphasis on beliefs and values at the expense of habit (see 1937, pp. 646–47). But, as Weber made clear when defining his terms, although traditionalism may *become* a pattern of belief around which reflective action is structured (1915*e*, p. 296; 1922*a*, p. 25), in the first instance it is exactly what habit is: “the psychic disposition (*Eingestelltheit*) toward habituated routine” as the basis of action (1915*e*, p. 296, m.t.; 1915*a*, p. 269). Insofar as Weber was serious about this equation of traditionalism with habit, one would have to conclude that habit was in operation well beyond those portions of his work examined so far; that it was actually one of the underlying foundation stones of the comparative-historical studies that constitute the core of Weberian sociology, since

traditionalism is among the central concepts used in these studies. To see just how serious Weber was, it is not necessary to look far: for whether his subject was the economic, religious, or political dimension of traditionalism, he continually stressed the firm linkage between traditionalism and habit.

Economic traditionalism, according to Weber, is the adherence to long-practiced economic forms, particularly "to products which are stereotyped in quantity and quality or to [an accustomed] level of earnings, or both" (1922*a*, p. 151; 1923*b*, p. 16). In his judgment, economic activity of this kind has been extremely prevalent, occurring not only among peasants the world over but also among medieval guildsmen, adventurer-capitalists, Indian artisans, Chinese petite bourgeoisie, and numbers of modern wage-laborers (see, e.g., 1904*a*, pp. 364–65; 1904–5*a*, pp. 59–76; 1906, pp. 321–22; 1915*c*, pp. 3–20; 1916–17, pp. 111–17). When discussing such examples, Weber freely acknowledged that certain actors may proceed in traditionalistic ways because doing so is in their economic interest or is mandated by their values and beliefs. Yet he explicitly denied that these reflective considerations are the principal bases of economic traditionalism. Indeed, he was very careful to set the latter apart from patterns of economic activity rooted in "self-interest" or "absolute values" and to conjoin it instead with habit, just as he elsewhere portrayed traditionalism in economic affairs as a force that is virtually instinctive, occurs "by nature," and is "great in itself," even without utilitarian and moral supports (1904–5*a*, p. 60; 1915*d*, p. 356; 1916–17, pp. 84, 112; 1922*a*, pp. 150–51; 1923*b*, p. 16). And, in his most systematic treatment of the topic, economic traditionalism was depicted primarily as a manifestation of humankind's "general incapacity and indisposition to depart from habituated paths" (1923*a*, p. 355, m.t.; 1923*b*, p. 303)—or, in other words, as a matter of habit (see also Marshall 1980, p. 115; Cohen et al. 1975, p. 232).

A similar emphasis appears in Weber's writings on religion and on domination. Throughout the former, there is much concern with what is variously called "the traditionalism of the laity," "magical traditionalism," or "magical stereotyping," expressions that generally designate the formerly almost universal tendency for "magically proved forms" of action to be "repeated in the form once established, [sometimes without] the slightest deviation" (1915*d*, p. 341; 1922*a*, pp. 405, 456; 1923*a*, p. 161; 1923*b*, p. 303). Like other action tendencies, this one, Weber held, has often been sustained by religious convictions and by practical interests (1915*d*, p. 331). But having said this, he hastened directly to connect magical traditionalism also with the habitual: with "the persisting habits of the masses" (1922*a*, p. 467, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 285; see also Warner 1970, p. 86). In his telling, the magical "habits" of the laity antedated the

development of systematic religious activity and retained a life of their own even afterward, as many world religions left the vast majority mired in its original traditionalism (1915*c*, pp. 229–30; 1915*e*, pp. 275–88; 1916–17, p. 342; 1922*a*, pp. 466, 470, 629, m.t.; 1922*b*, p. 284; 1923*a*, p. 363). Traditionalism's habitual underpinnings are clearly brought out as well in Weber's treatment of political domination, particularly when he examined the nature of traditional authority and sought the foundation for this "oldest and most universal type of legitimacy" (1922*a*, p. 37). His statements here speak for themselves: a traditional "structure of domination [is based] on the belief in the inviolability of what has always been; [this belief] derives . . . effectiveness from the inner disposition (*Eingestelltheit*) to the conditioned power of the purely habitual"—that is, from actors' "habitual orientation to conform" and "general psychological inhibitions against any sort of change in ingrained habits of action" (1918, p. 79; 1922*a*, pp. 37, 1008, m.t.; 1922*b*, pp. 19, 582).

At this point, it is perhaps worth observing that, in addition to indicating that Weber retained the ancient concept of habit and put it to work to understand what he saw as the great, protean force of traditionalism, Weber's writings on traditionalism may be seen as developing (in a way that, to my knowledge, has nowhere been matched) a macrosociological perspective on habit. If Durkheim's reformist zeal propelled him to examine the micro-level development of specific moral habits, Weber's comparative-historical orientation led him away from this issue and into a more thoroughgoing investigation of the larger social and cultural conditions under which general societal patterns of habitual action wax and wane.

It was Weber's belief that habitual action does not occur at random. While individuals everywhere may act out of habit on occasion, they are not all equally inclined in this direction in all domains of their activity, for there is a strong affinity between the way of life within different social groups and the propensity of group members toward various sorts of habitual or reflective conduct. Peasants, for example, live a "simple and organic existence" revolving around a recurring "cycle" of natural events, with the result that traditionalism typically "goes without saying"; the situation with artisans is sometimes much the same (1915*d*, pp. 344, 346; 1916–17, pp. 104, 112, 313; 1922*a*, pp. 468, 1197). In contrast, members of "civic strata [exhibit a] tendency towards a practical rationalism, [for] their whole existence [is] based upon technological and economic calculations [and] the mastery of nature and man" (1915*e*, p. 284). Reflective tendencies, of this and other types, can be detected, too, among lay and religious intellectuals and among incumbents of rulership positions (1915*c*, pp. 41–44, 142–43; 1922*a*, pp. 467–518). Yet, as Weber continued, groups that have been imbued with these nontraditional tenden-

cies have often derived real or ideal benefits from traditionalistic arrangements. Indeed, in many past social formations, such groups accrued tremendous advantages, both economic and political, from the unreflecting, habitual practices of the masses, and “manifold vested interests” thus aligned themselves on the side of traditionalism (1922*a*, p. 37), which received further reinforcement from religious and philosophical creeds opposed to the alteration of established modes of conduct (see 1915*c*, pp. 27–28, *passim*; 1916–17, pp. 102–33, *passim*; 1922*a*, pp. 199, 202, 239, *passim*; 1923*a*, pp. 138–41, 355–65). In broad historical terms, the result of social and cultural forces of these sorts has been the establishment of a macro-level “political, economic, and ideological structure” in which predominantly traditional action has prevailed in place of other forms of human activity (1915*c*, p. 6). This is the sociological rationale behind Weber’s contention that so much of the past was “a sea of traditionalism” (1909, p. 210; see also 1922*a*, p. 245). Given, moreover, that certain ways of life supportive of traditionalism as well as various “vested interests” concerned with perpetuating this orientation last into modern times (1918, p. 104), one can likewise appreciate his argument that traditionalism is a “condition . . . transcended only gradually”; that “even in cases where there is a high degree of rationalization of action, the element of traditional orientation remains considerable” (1923*b*, p. 16; translation by Shils 1981, p. 9; Weber 1922*a*, p. 69). One might notice, too, that these judgments about the occurrence of traditionalism—about its heavy preponderance in previous historical periods and its persistence long afterward—directly parallel Weber’s remarks about the historical incidence of habitual action, exactly as we should expect in view of the close correspondence between traditionalism and habit in the Weberian lexicon.

Exploring the macrohistorical circumstances conducive to traditional or habitual action was, of course, only a part of Weber’s project. Not these conditions, but the involved sociocultural process by which they were overcome to make way for modern Western rationalism and capitalism provides the evident focus of much of Weber’s work. Here, however, we are on terrain sufficiently familiar that it can be largely passed over, except in one respect. It scarcely need be emphasized that the Calvinist Reformation figures significantly in Weber’s account of the development of the modern Western world. In describing this account, most commentators use the standard terminology of reflective models of action; they argue that Weber viewed Calvinist ideas as the source of a new complex of values and norms (i.e., the inner-worldly ascetic principles of “the Protestant ethic”), which, in turn, fostered the emergence of the rational orientation to conduct known as “the spirit of capitalism” (Marshall 1980, pp. 14–27). This interpretation is quite faithful to Weber’s work, but only up to a point. For just as Durkheim held that moral action

in the modern world depends less on simply trading one set of beliefs for another than on the formation of an entirely new moral habitus, so Weber maintained that Calvinism spurred rational economic action because it went beyond the articulation of ideas that favored such activity and produced, instead, a fundamentally different “‘habitus’ among individuals which prepared them in specific ways to live up to the specific demands of early modern capitalism” (1910*a*, p. 1124; 1915*c*, pp. 242–43).

Weber's thesis here is of a piece with his other writings on religion. In his view, it has been one of the highest aims of many salvation religions to impart to religious “virtuosi” a “total character”: a “specifically religious habitus”—or “charismatic habitus,” or “permanent habitus”—which transcends the “ordinary habitus” of everyday life, that is, the often unshakable natural habitus of the majority that takes life as a “miscellaneous succession of discrete actions” and thus makes do with traditionalist ways and an “adherence to the habitual” (1915*c*, pp. 231–32, m.t.; 1915*b*, pp. 517–18; 1922*a*, pp. 534–40, m.t.; 1922*b*, pp. 325–28). The exclusively virtuoso sects of Calvinism went the furthest in this regard; “from their religious life, out of their religiously conditioned family traditions and from the religiously influenced life-style of their environment” emerged a “central inner habitus”—“a methodically unified disposition (*Eingestelltheit*)”—which, when channeled into inner-worldly activities, resulted in a historically momentous efflorescence of sustained rational conduct (1910*a*, p. 1124; 1915*c*, pp. 240, 244, m.t.; 1915*b*, pp. 527, 531). In this sense, modern rational action itself rests, for Weber, on a foundation of habit: on a dynamic *habitus* that supplants the static *habitus* that underlies simple habitual action. It is true that these are not the terms in which the Weberian position is ordinarily summarized. They are, however, the terms in which Weber himself sought to represent his argument. Indeed, Weber not only declared explicitly that, when *The Protestant Ethic* speaks of the development of the “capitalist spirit,” it means “the development of [a] particular *habitus*,” he stated unequivocally that his controversial study “intentionally [concentrated on] the aspect most difficult to grasp and ‘prove,’ [the aspect] relating to the inner habitus” (1910*b*, pp. 157, 186, n. 39; latter translation by Tribe in Hennis 1983, p. 146; see also Weber 1904–5*b*, p. 182).

For all this emphasis on the habitual, there is nonetheless one way in which the concept of habit occupies an uneasy place in Weber's thought. To understand this, it is important to recognize that, during the late 19th and early 20th century, the German academic world was, like its counterparts elsewhere, a competitive arena in which the advocates of many then-emerging disciplines, sociology included, struggled fiercely for

a secure position within the universities alongside the older branches of the natural and sociocultural sciences and such upstart fields as psychology (see Ben-David and Collins 1966, pp. 461–63; Eisenstadt and Curelaru 1976, pp. 30–34; Oberschall 1965, p. 13). Writing from a distinguished and easily won chair of economics, Weber actually exhibited a good deal more openness regarding these interdisciplinary border disputes than many of his contemporaries (Hennis 1983, p. 161). He, too, however, was an active participant in the *Methodenstreit*, the celebrated controversy over the nature of science that provided the intellectual background to the disciplinary squabbles (see Burger 1976, pp. 140–53; Cahnman 1964; Oakes 1975, pp. 16–39).

In positioning himself amid this controversy, Weber set the natural sciences apart from the sociocultural sciences, holding that it is only the latter disciplines—those with which he was allied—that treat humans as “cultural beings” whose action embodies a “subjective meaning, [which] may be more or less clear to the actor, whether consciously noted or not” (1904*b*, p. 81; 1913, p. 152). The objective of such sciences, therefore, is to understand human action by “identify[ing] a concrete ‘motive’ . . . to which we can attribute the conduct in question” (1903–6, p. 125). The natural sciences, in contrast, eschew this “subjective understanding of action [and favor] the explanation of individual facts by applying [general causal laws]” (1922*a*, p. 15). Accordingly, it was among the natural sciences that Weber classified most contemporary psychology, with its search for the “laws of psychophysics” and its fragmentation of experience into such “ ‘elements’ [as] ‘stimuli,’ ‘sensations,’ ‘reactions,’ [and] ‘automatisms’ ” (1903–6, pp. 136, 140; 1908*a*, p. 31). In his opinion, the sociocultural sciences—economics, history, and also sociology—could do without all this, for action “does not . . . become more ‘understandable’ than it would otherwise by the [introduction of] psychophysical” concepts (1908*a*, p. 29). Yet, as Weber’s wide reading of the European and American psychological literature disclosed, these were precisely the concepts under which the business of habit was commonly subsumed (see 1908*b*, pp. 112–34; 1908–9, pp. 64–65, n. 1, 72–106).

For a more sectarian academic, this circumstance might well have sufficed to place habit altogether beyond the purview of the sociocultural sciences. Weber did not succumb to this knee-jerk reaction, however. If the work of psychologists drained the subjective meaning out of habit, his own researches tended in the opposite direction, not only when examining such great vessels of meaning as the *habitus* of Calvinism and of other salvation religions but also when considering more mundane work habits, military habits, political habits, magical habits, and the like. For at no point did Weber treat such phenomena, in the manner of the natural

scientist studying human activity, as “incomprehensive statistical probabilit[ies]” (1922*a*, p. 12); that is, as nonunderstandable behaviors for which it is impossible to identify any conscious or nonconscious motive.

Nevertheless, even Weber came within the spell of psychological notions of habit. He thus couched his definition of traditional action in the psychophysical argot of “stimuli” and “automatic reactions,” and he tended likewise to portray this form of action as existing “by nature” and antecedent to culture (see above, and 1922*a*, pp. 17, 320–21, 333, 1134). Given the interdisciplinary controversies of his age and his commitment to study “cultural beings” while setting aside the natural scientific approach of the psychologists, these views on habit could but raise grave doubts about the concept’s relevance within the Weberian conception of the sociocultural sciences. Such doubts were codified in *Economy and Society*, where Weber urged the sociologist to investigate meaningful social action and then announced that traditional or habitual conduct—described here in psychophysical terms, rather than in the interpretive language used in his empirical studies—“lies very close to the borderline of what can justifiably be called meaningfully oriented action, and indeed often on the other side” (1922*a*, p. 25). This formulation was a risky compromise. It left the door to the domain of habit sufficiently open that Weber’s sociology could still incorporate his own ample analyses of habitual action, but it set that door precariously enough ajar that those with other inclinations might quickly close it, and close it for good.

The American Scene

To American contemporaries of Durkheim and Weber, the concept of habit was also a familiar item. In the last decades of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th—to go back no further—one finds the idea all over the intellectual landscape, invoked alike by popular reformers, by solemn Harvard philosophers, by social evolutionists with Lamarckian leanings, and by evolutionary thinkers of a more Darwinian bent, such as Sumner on the right and Veblen on the left (see Curti 1980, pp. 233–34; Kuklick 1977, pp. 74–75, *passim*; Stocking 1968, pp. 238–69; Sumner 1906; Veblen 1899, pp. 107–8, *passim*). Mention of these evolutionary currents itself suggests something of the biologicistic light in which habit was seen at this time. But the best indication of this, as well as of the concept’s continuing utilization, appears in the work of the early American psychologists. This work is particularly instructive since not only does it contain the age’s most systematic statements about habit, it also reveals the point of departure for the sociological treatments of the subject that were produced during the same period.

To appreciate the psychologists’ views properly, however, a few words

about institutional context are necessary. In the post–Civil War era, American intellectual life was affected deeply by the emergence of major research-oriented universities and numerous satellite colleges, which offered, to those men and women fortunate enough to establish themselves securely on the inside, solid research and career opportunities that had long been in notoriously short supply. In this regard, members of disciplines constituted as separate departments were in an especially favored position, since “departmental status [meant] increased rewards in funds and power, [an arrangement that] provided a powerful impetus to the [splitting off of] distinct subjects” (Ross 1979; p. 123). Here, however, there were contenders aplenty, a majority of them viewed suspiciously by those who were already within the various institutions of higher education and quick, therefore, to demand that new fields justify their own entry into the academy by “constantly prov[ing] and solidify[ing] their status as sciences” (Ross 1979, p. 125). Faced with this requirement, it was the young discipline of psychology that became a particular success story, achieving (despite fits and starts) departmental rank in many leading universities by around the turn of the century and spreading outward to other higher educational institutions by the end of World War I (see Camfield 1973; Cravens 1978, pp. 58–71; Curti 1980, pp. 197–203; Watson 1965). Much of the reason for this was precisely the fact that, from its start, American psychology followed the example of the new European psychology and brought to the study of mental life the concepts and methods of Darwinian biology and experimental physiology—sciences then at the summit of the academic hierarchy (see Boring 1950; Cravens 1978, pp. 56–86). For all the disputes that soon emerged within academic psychology, moreover, this staunch commitment to build the field along the lines of the established biophysical sciences was one that actually grew all the stronger by the early decades of the 20th century, as the philosophically trained pioneers of psychology left the scene to numbers of specialized researchers determined to push forward the campaign to institutionalize their eminently scientific discipline (see Camfield 1973, pp. 70–73; Smith 1981, pp. 28–29).

The image of habit that had been incubated in 19th-century Europe came into its own in this situation, for habitual processes were a topic to which American psychologists frequently turned, and, whenever they did, what emerged was the idea that habit is an essentially biophysiological phenomenon, most in evidence in the simple activities of human and other organisms. This idea was already presented as a truism in the broadly read work of William James, which, in seeking to show how “mechanical science . . . set[s] her brand of ownership on the matter,” laid it down that habit bespeaks the fact that “our nervous system grows to the modes in which it has been exercised,” so much so that even complex

habits are "nothing but concatenated discharges in the nerve-centers, due to the presence there of systems of reflex paths" (1890, pp. 107–8, 112). Congruent views were widely expressed: by the veteran scholar Baldwin, to whom habits were "lower motor syntheses" (1897, p. 55, n. 2); by the rising young experimentalist Yerkes, who regarded habit, whether in turtles, frogs, or humans, as "a tendency toward a certain action [resulting from the development in the organism] of a track [along which] nervous impulse[s] pass" (1901, p. 545); by the eclectic theoretician Andrews, who concluded in an important effort at synthesis that "habit . . . is at bottom a physiological phenomenon [involving] neural modifications [caused] by the neural excitations" (1903, pp. 139, 149). Similar statements were inscribed into the textbooks of the period by authorities such as Angell, Judd, Pillsbury, and Swift (see Fearing 1930, pp. 242, 247; Watson 1914, pp. 252–56).

The complete triumph of this point of view came when John Watson launched, early in the second decade of this century, the "behavioral movement" in American psychology. Determined to make psychology even more manifestly scientific than it had already become, to purge the field of all "introspectively isolable elements [such as] sensation, perception, imagery, etc.," and to "write psychology [instead] in terms of stimulus and response" (1913, pp. 199, 201), Watson adopted a thoroughly physiologized conception of habit and then placed this concept at the very center of his program for the analysis of human conduct. In Watson's view, habit is simply a "system of [acquired] reflexes" or responses, or, in other words, part of "the total striped and unstriped muscular and glandular changes which follow upon a given [environmental] stimulus" (1914, pp. 184–85; 1919, p. 14; see also 1914, pp. 184–276; 1919, pp. 169–347). He contended, furthermore, that "man *is* the sum of his instincts and habits," meaning hereby that *all* noninstinctive activity is to be seen as habit in his particular sense of the term (1917, p. 55; 1919, p. 270). So insistent was Watson on this count that he actually conceived of thinking itself—which had long been regarded as the ultimate basis of reflective human action—merely as an operation of the "tongue, throat, and laryngeal muscles . . . moving in habitual trains" (1919, p. 11).

Had Watson's pronouncements been idiosyncratic outpourings, one might, of course, easily write them off. In fact, however, his behaviorism not only represented an integration of a good deal of previous work in American psychology, it also became, by the mid-1920s, one of the great intellectual orthodoxies among professional psychologists, many of whom were utterly "electrified by . . . Watson's ideas," which worked so well to consolidate the scientific status of their rising field (Cravens and Burnham 1971, p. 645; see also Baken 1966; Burnham 1968*b*; Curti 1980, pp. 373–

80; Samuelson 1981). Nor were Watson and his confederates reluctant to extend their claims into the traditional domains of the social sciences. Convinced that human groupings, both simple and complex, differed from Tortuga's birds and white rats in little more than the greater intricacy of their habits, Watson offered his psychology as a master tool "to guide society . . . towards the control of group [as well as] individual behavior" (1913, p. 202; 1917; 1919, pp. 2–3); and, following suit, fellow behaviorists such as Floyd Allport defined social institutions themselves "merely [as] similar and reciprocal habits of individual behavior" and then proposed that the discipline appropriate for the study of the social world "is not sociology, but psychology," which derives its principles from "biology, chemistry, and the other natural sciences" (1924, p. 18; 1927, pp. 167–68).

As we shall see, sociologists found claims of this sort far too much to bear and soon reacted adversely to the entire, physiologically contaminated business of habit. The important point to appreciate, however, is that prior to this development, American sociologists also made ready use of the age-old concept, sometimes employing it in the manner of 18th- and 19th-century European social thinkers, though more often actually endorsing the psychologists' biophysiological approach. Such an endorsement will seem remarkable, too, until it is recognized that, from the late 19th century through the early years of the 20th century, American "sociology as a whole rested primarily on [a psychological]" foundation and freely adopted the "assumptions of contemporary physiological psychology" (Petras 1970, p. 231; Cravens 1978, p. 142; see also Hinkle 1980, pp. 69–71; Hinkle and Hinkle 1954, pp. 7–9; Lewis and Smith 1980, pp. 153–80). This was true, at any rate, among those sociologists who regarded their field as a bona fide intellectual discipline, for much that then went under the name of "sociology" was really a motley assortment of efforts at moral reform and practical social improvement (Oberschall 1972, p. 203). It was, indeed, under the applied banner that sociology first insinuated itself into many higher educational institutions, where it long survived chiefly as an undergraduate vocational offering, taught by part-time instructors (Cravens 1978, p. 123; Oberschall 1972, pp. 210–13). The discipline, as a result, was perpetually surrounded "by a sea of academic doubters who questioned [its] substance"—a situation brought home by the rarity with which sociology was accorded departmental rank or admitted into prestigious universities (other than Columbia and Chicago) (Ross 1979, p. 117; see also Cravens 1978, pp. 123–38; Furner 1975, pp. 291–312; Oberschall 1972). Under these circumstances, would-be professional sociologists understandably developed "an obsessive concern with the academic legitimation [of their discipline] as a science" (Oberschall 1972, p. 189). It was in part to achieve this legitimation that

these thinkers widely and frequently predicated their analyses of social life on the findings of the more established science of psychology, just as psychology had in its turn appealed to the distinguished biological fields (Cravens 1978, p. 141).

Accordingly, among sociologists of the time, the concept of habit continued to function—alongside terms encompassing the reflective side of human conduct—as an active partner in the enterprise of social theory. Examples are plentiful: Giddings accepting the notion that habit is an affair of the “nervous apparatus” and then making it the very task of sociology to study “the nature of the soci[al] man], his habits and his activities” (1900, pp. 11, 72); Cooley nodding likewise toward the physiological usage of habit and concerning himself with how “habit [exerts a] fixing and consolidating action in the growth of the self,” with the development of the “habit of conscience,” with the way the modern economy generates “a whole system of [restless] habits,” and so on (1902, pp. 187, 368, 370, 379; 1909, pp. 328–29); Ross attending in detail to “habits of consumption” and “habits of production” (1908, pp. 262–66); the young W. I. Thomas asserting that “all sociological manifestations proceed from physiological conditions” and placing “the habits of the group” and their vagaries among the primary interests of the social theorist (1905, pp. 446–47, 449–51; Stocking 1968, p. 260); Hayes (a decade later still) defining habits as “established cerebrate tendencies” and describing them as decisive molders of the human personality (1915, pp. 297–98, 394); and Ellwood adopting a neurophysiological view of habit and then declaring that “for the individual and for society habit is of supreme importance, [since it is] the main carrier of all those forms of association . . . which rise above the merely instinctive level, [and is thus] the chief raw material on which cultural evolution must act. The higher stages of human culture [have actually] been built up by the gradual development [of] higher types of habit, [and] the social order of even the very highest civilization is almost entirely made up of habitual types of [individual] reaction” (1912, p. 107; 1917, pp. 62–63). Even Robert Park, just embarking upon his academic career, jumped on the bandwagon, exuberantly lauding work on “the physiology of the nervous system,” defining “character [as] nothing more than the sum . . . of those mechanisms which we call habit,” and announcing “that education and social control are largely dependent upon our ability to establish habits in ourselves and in others” (1915, pp. 82, 84; see also 1904, p. 39).

Despite all this, the concept's days were numbered. As behaviorism grew in strength among psychologists in the decade or so after World War I and made its advances into sociological territories, sociologists defensively recoiled from the conceptual framework of physiological psychology. That they reacted in this way, moreover, is more a commentary on

the state of sociology itself than on behaviorism, for the better-established social sciences of the time were generally unruffled by the behaviorist challenge (see Curti 1980, pp. 395–98). Sociology, however, remained in a vulnerable position, lagging behind in terms of academic institutionalization as late as the early 1920s, when the discipline still consisted mainly of a scattering of undergraduate courses taught from within other departments (see Cravens 1978, pp. 129–30; Ross 1979, pp. 124–25). Committed spokesmen for the field thus became ever more passionately concerned with the vigorous “assertion of [the] disciplinary autonomy” of sociology (Matthews 1977, p. 149; Cravens 1978, pp. 121–22, 147–53) and responded with alarm at the behaviorists’ encroachments. Indeed, for many practitioners of sociology, the whole postwar period stood out as an age when “extreme behaviorism threatened to dominate the sociological scene” (Odum 1951, p. 450).

Fearful of just such an outcome, sociologists moved with dispatch to stem the apparent tide of behaviorism, and it was in so doing that they purposefully abandoned the venerable concept of habit. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule—Bernard (1926), who sought a compromise with the behaviorists that preserved habit in its physiological trappings; MacIver (1931), who was steeped in a tradition of European social theory antedating behaviorism and continued to speak of moral, religious, political, and economic habits (cf. Sorokin 1947, pp. 43–51). But, increasingly, these were minority voices. In the view of many sociologists, habit *was* the behaviorist idea of habit: to countenance this was to accept behaviorism’s physiologically reductionist account of human action in the social world and to rule out all those instances of reflective action that had long held an important place in American sociology along with habitual action. That broader conceptualizations of habit might have been substituted for the behaviorist formulation and were actually available in so ready a source as Dewey (1922; see n. 3 above) mattered little. Dewey’s statements on habit were read but not seized as an alternative (Allport 1954, p. 59), for in an intellectual setting where habit was so closely associated with psychology, any use of the concept seemed to exhibit just the kind of “rel[iance] on concepts borrowed from another discipline” that jeopardized the autonomy of sociology (Matthews 1977, p. 149).⁸ It is true, as sociologists frankly admitted, that breaking with psychology meant that sociology could no longer enhance its scientific credentials by leaning on the “reputation of the physical sciences” (Ellwood 1930, p.

⁸ Mead’s “social behaviorism,” however, was palatable because it concentrated on “the activity of individuals insofar as they are acting as self-conscious members of a social group,” even though Mead himself “saw *most* acts as habituated responses proceeding without self-conscious reflection” (Lewis and Smith 1980, pp. 144, 160).

187); but by this point such a sacrifice appeared preferable to remaining in the “intellectual thralldom” of psychology and automatically relinquishing the larger goal of institutional independence (Cravens 1978, p. 191). What eluded sociological thinkers here was that they were merely inverting the approach they rejected: that just as Watson made habit virtually everything in social life, so in casting the concept aside, sociologists were, in effect, allotting habit no role in the social world worth even speaking of. The once-accepted proposition that habit embraces *part* of the process of social action thus met its opposite in two extreme directions, as the quest for academic autonomy eroded the prospects for continuing in the middle way.

This sweeping shift away from habit found its earliest expression in the work of Thomas. In the immediate aftermath of his own early exposure to Watsonian behaviorism (see Jennings et al. 1917), Thomas unequivocally reversed his once-positive stance toward physiology and likewise toward habit. Now, deeming unacceptable “the principles recently developed by the behavioristic school,” particularly its “indistinct [application] of the term ‘habit’ to [all] uniformities of behavior,” he bluntly declared that “‘habit’ . . . should be restricted to the biological field; [for it] involves no conscious, purposeful regulation of [conduct], but merely . . . is unreflective. . . . The uniformity of behavior [that constitutes social life] is not a uniformity of organic habits but of consciously followed rules” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918, 2:1849–52). Situated within the acclaimed volumes of *The Polish Peasant*, this pronouncement was an extremely important one, not least because it was conjoined with a proposal to instate the concept of “attitude” at the center of social theory (1918, 1:22–35, 2:1831–63). Indeed, it has been argued that this proposal by Thomas was actually the watershed in the process by which the term “attitude” took on its modern meaning and was projected into prominence (see Fleming 1967, pp. 322–31). This is not to say that Thomas offered his new concept as an inoffensive synonym for habit; on the contrary, he conceptualized attitude as an aspect of “individual consciousness which determines” more reflective types of action (1918, 1:22, 2:1853; Fleming 1967, pp. 326–27). But it was not long before nonreflective processes were wholly eclipsed, as it became commonplace to use attitude to describe “tendencies of action” that might otherwise have been called habits (Faris 1928, pp. 276–77).

As this practice took hold, the campaign against habit that had commenced with *The Polish Peasant* enlisted substantial support. Thus, Ellwood, who had previously seen habit as the essence of cultural evolution, was soon convinced that “to express [man’s] cultural evolution in terms of stimulus and habit is . . . inadequate, [since] it formulates what is distinctive of man in terms of what is common to both man and the animals

below him" (1918, p. 789). Increasingly critical of the whole idea of habit and of "the Behaviorist [who neglects everything] except the modification of habits or reflexes," Ellwood devoted much of his later work to the reflective "intellectual elements" by which humans transcend the habitual (1927, p. 65, 75; 1930, p. 204). In due course, Park, too, came to argue that what we do "when we behave most like human beings [is] pretty sure to escape the behaviorists [who focus on] habits"; that human character is neither "instinctive nor . . . habitual," but an outgrowth of "present attitudes," which the sociologist can study without recourse to the "physiological term . . . habit" (1930, p. 98; 1931, pp. 17–32; cf. Park and Burgess 1921, pp. 438–39; Park and Miller 1921, pp. 82–83). Faris sounded similar themes, lashing out against the "physiological psychology and neurological psychology" of the behaviorists, disdaining their "defective theory of habit" and concluding "the word 'habit' is quite unsatisfactory" to capture all the "thinking and striving" that constitute human social conduct; for him also, attitude was the preferable concept (1921, p. 194; 1924, p. 41; ca. 1930*a*, p. 236; ca. 1930*b*, pp. 244–46).⁹ In fact, so readily did this general point of view make its mark that, by the early 1930s, Queen could approvingly report that "in recent years . . . students of human relations have talked less about habits and more about attitudes" (1931, p. 209), while histories of American sociology from the same period could identify no contemporary sociological treatments of habit save for those of Bernard and Dewey and digressed instead to the topic of attitude (Bogardus 1929, pp. 518–19; Karpf 1932, pp. 334–42, 408–9). And a few years later, when Znaniecki issued his massive treatise *Social Actions*, he could confidently reiterate the point, made years before with Thomas, that "'habit' [is an expression that sociologists] prefer not to use," since it denominates a "biological 'behavioral' pattern [that] is of no importance for the study of [social] actions" (1936, pp. 40–42) and, with that, let the matter drop altogether.

In the following year, a young Talcott Parsons added to the chorus. One often-overlooked leitmotif of *The Structure of Social Action* is, in fact, what Parsons later described as its "vigorous . . . polemicizing" against behaviorism (1978*a*, p. 1353). Attacking "the behavioristic scheme" for reducing the individual to a "biophysical unit" and

⁹ Like many a natural scientist who has practiced under one paradigm and can never entirely shift to another in the wake of a scientific revolution (see Kuhn 1962, pp. 144–59), Thomas, Ellwood, Park, and Faris all had moments when they lapsed back into talk about habit, even after they had formally denied the sociological value of the concept (see, e.g., Thomas 1927, pp. 143–47; Ellwood 1925, pp. 88–93; Park 1930, p. 96; Faris 1937, p. 182). Only in the generation that succeeded these pioneers was their conceptual break with the past fully carried through—again, much as in the case of scientific revolutions.

"exclud[ing the] subjective aspect" of human conduct, Parsons was led, like his early contemporaries, to equate habit directly with "the psychological concept of habit" or, in other words, with the behaviorists' endless talk about organically "conditioned reflexes or habits" (1937, pp. 76–78, 116, 380, n. 3, 647; see also 1934, pp. 437–40)—an equation he was to retain for much of his career (1959, p. 687; 1975, pp. 667–68; 1978*b*, p. 389; cf. Parsons and Shils 1951, pp. 78, 89, 125). But such an equation could only prove inimical to habit since, when writing *The Structure of Social Action*, Parsons was as eager as others in the sociological community to differentiate the sociologist's approach from the behaviorist approach, for the latter seemed to imply that there was "no place" for the young field of sociology (1937, pp. 115–17, 773–74). He accordingly proposed to establish sociology as one of a handful of "independent" sciences of action, each of which would have as its domain one of the four "emergent properties" of action systems—with "the hereditary basis of personality" falling to psychology, "economic rationality" to economics, "coercive rationality" to political science, and "common-value integration" to sociology (1937, pp. 760–73). For present purposes, what is most striking about this seemingly encompassing scheme is that, beyond the "residuum . . . referable to heredity" (1937, p. 769), it is a mapping wholly limited to the provinces of reflective action, a limitation that accords well with Parsons's premise that action consists of a reasoned selection of means and ends by the application of "guiding norms" (1937, pp. 26, 44–45, 48). Twist and turn his ground plan for the sciences of action as much as we like, it yields no niche within sociology, or even within allied disciplines, for the study of habitual forms of human social action. For Parsons, as for other sociological opponents of behaviorism during the 1920s and 1930s, habit had abruptly ceased to be an acceptable, going concern of the social theorist.

There are, however, factors that make Parsons's own treatment of habit in *The Structure of Social Action* especially significant. For one thing, this treatment was presented in conjunction with a lengthy—and ultimately very influential—account of the development of European social thought, which, aside from a few dismissive remarks (1937, pp. 321, 646), wrote habit out of the whole history of modern social theory, even when considering Durkheim and Weber. This was so despite the fact that, throughout the actual course of this history, habit had often referred to inner dispositions and tendencies that were very much part of the subjective side of human conduct that Parsons now counterposed to habit. Parsons's analysis stands out, in addition, because it articulated, far more explicitly than the work of Thomas, Ellwood, Park, and the others had done, the underlying conception of action at which one arrives once the idea of habit is set aside. This conception, as clearly stated by

Parsons, postulates that all action exhibits a “common structure”: that action processes do not vary in their forms, only in their substance—that is, only in terms of the particular means, ends, and norms with which given actors are concerned (1937, pp. 733–34; see also Warner 1978, pp. 1321–22; Zaret 1980, p. 1194). And here lies the problem.

* * *

If we take a larger historical perspective on the matter of habit than that adopted by those who dispensed with the concept, then to homogenize action processes in the way that Parsons’s work illustrates so well is, I submit, unsatisfactory for three reasons. First, the homogenized view of action effectively blocks out consideration of the empirical role of habit in the social world. For thinkers like Durkheim and Weber, habit was of significant consequence in economic, political, religious, and moral life, and elsewhere as well; but its consequences are not something one is at all prompted to investigate, or even to notice, when one assumes that action always takes the form of a reflective weighing, by various normative standards, of means to ends. Parsons has, it is true, acknowledged that “the adequate understanding of many concrete phenomena may require the employment of analytical categories drawn from” outside the sciences of action (1937, p. 757). But this declaration has proved to be a dead letter both in his own later work and in most contemporaneous lines of sociological research, for habitual phenomena simply do not congeal as salient empirical realities for those who operate with a model of action that allots no place to habit.

A second problem with this model is its neglect of the theoretical implications of habitual action, including those that relate directly to the central task that Parsons sets for a theory of action—the task of “account[ing] for the element of order in social relationships” (1937, p. 102). In accord with his reflective conceptualization of action, Parsons holds (in Münch’s [1982, p. 776] useful summary) that social order derives from “the reciprocal penetration of instrumental . . . and normatively obligated action.” Neither he nor critics of his position on this point raise any question whatever about the extent to which social regularities obtain because humans also act in more nonreflective, habitual ways. Nowhere does Parsons confront the Durkheimian thesis about the place of habit in moral education and consider the degree to which the reflective moral action that he finds so necessary to sustain social order may rest on a foundation of habits implanted early on and may thereafter crystallize only insofar as there are numbers of activities that remain largely habitual. Even less does the Parsonsian model of action accommodate a more Weberian macrosociological perspective on the issue: the possibility

that some actors may derive real or ideal advantages because other actors proceed (in some areas) in habitual ways, with the result that the advantaged actors may pursue courses of conduct that serve to perpetuate, or to refashion, these habitual ways and the order they imply (cf. Bourdieu and Passeron 1970).

The third difficulty with homogenizing action as Parsons does lies in the resulting conception of the relationship between the human personality and the social world. In his famous attack on the utilitarian tradition, Parsons declares that "the most fundamental criticism of utilitarianism is that it has had a wrong conception of the concrete human personality" (1937, p. 387). What he does not perceive, however, is the marked similarity between the alternative he develops and the formulation he criticizes. For whether action is depicted as the pursuit of economic ends via norms of efficiency, or whether more sublime ends and obligatory moral norms are also taken into consideration, the underlying assumption is that the human personality is essentially the aggregate of various end preferences and normative orientations—attributes whose content Parsons sees as varying in different social groups and constituting the basic substance of the socialization process. Missing altogether here is an appreciation for the point that Durkheim and Weber urged when adopting the concept of *habitus*, namely, that personality is a good deal more than the tidy sum of attributes like these; that the implications for actual conduct of any particular norms, beliefs, and ideas are highly contingent on the basic cast or form of the whole personality of which these components are parts—on a generalized disposition whose very shape may differ with variations in the socialization practices of different groups and may undergo major reorganization as social formations change historically. This way of seeing personality was lost sight of, too, as the homogenized view of action proposed by Parsons codified the outcome of the campaign against habit that he and his older contemporaries were waging on behalf of the cause of sociology.

CONCLUSION

For the present, there is no need to carry this historical investigation forward in time. It is enough to record that, as habit was progressively discarded from the language of sociology, new cohorts of sociologists who learned this language afresh inevitably came to couch their own thoughts and theories in terms other than habit, whether or not they were at all cognizant of the rejection of the concept by the likes of Thomas, Park, Faris, Znaniecki, or the increasingly prominent Parsons. Since the terms that were current embraced action only to the extent that it was of a reflective variety, the work of these cohorts tended ineluctably (though often unwittingly) to recapitulate Parsons's course in *The Structure of*

Social Action: to portray all social action as possessing a common structure and then to overlook both the empirical and theoretical significance of habitual conduct and the role of *habitus* in the organization of the human personality.

One might argue, to be sure, that sociology as a whole benefited, in a very tangible way, from leaving these matters aside and getting on with other business: that the excision of habit effectively abetted institutionalization of the discipline as well as the various substantive achievements that institutionalization made possible. But these benefits have long since been secured; they have ceased to afford grounds for trampling on conceptual resources that were blighted in the heat of long-forgotten circumstances. By uncovering these circumstances and thus bringing to light the historical process through which the conceptual structure of sociology has come to have its delimited focus, research on sociology's past constitutes a clear invitation to those who currently work within that structure and take its focus for granted at last to look without and consider seriously the broader alternatives that are in fact available to them.

In undertaking to examine the history of the alternative that is the concept of habit, this article has proposed that recent efforts to overcome presentist approaches to the study of sociology's past be expanded so that works other than acknowledged sociological classics and ideas other than those occupying the foreground of the classics come to be recognized as integral to understanding the history of sociological thought. It has maintained, furthermore, that to appreciate how the conceptual fabric of sociology initially acquired certain of its basic properties, it is instructive to investigate the intellectual consequences of the interdisciplinary disputes that accompanied the establishment of sociology as an independent academic discipline and, in so doing, to examine the conceptual framework of those fields from which sociologists of earlier generations were seeking to differentiate their own discipline. Applying these suggestions, this study has found that the concept of habit was long a staple item in the idiom of Western social thinkers; that it served as a ramifying background force in the work of both Durkheim and Weber, exerting a decisive effect even as they came to terms with the central sociological issues posed in their writings; but that, during the early decades of the 20th century, the term was intentionally expunged from the vocabulary of sociology as American sociologists attempted to establish the autonomy of their discipline by severing its ties with the field of psychology, where (esp. in connection with the growth of behavioralism) a restricted notion of habit had come into very widespread usage. As struggles go, this particular confrontation with psychology was one that ended quickly and was soon forgotten—though forgotten at the same time that it left permanent effects on the inner conceptual structure of sociological thought.

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