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Understanding *The Structure of Social Action*

Introduction

Parsons's first major opus, *The Structure of Social Action*, did not become a classic of sociology when it first appeared in 1937.¹ Although it was reviewed in both *The American Journal of Sociology* and the newly established *American Sociological Review*, and even featured in the widely read *The Saturday Review of Literature*, such recognition did not produce much acclaim for the book.

The review in *The Saturday Review of Literature* entitled "Is Homo Sapiens?" an essay by Robert Bierstedt, who was then based at Columbia University's Department of Philosophy, addressed Parsons as "a young Heidelberg-trained sociologist at Harvard."² Bierstedt found the book opposed to an objective empiricist approach, which, he said, presumably made it unlikely that "such hard-headed empiricists as the authors of 'Middletown in Transition' would bother to read *The Structure of Social Action*." In his view, it proposed a subjective approach which was "the 'voluntaristic theory of action' growing out of . . . theoretical convergence" that claimed to be able to "give sociology a well-defined field of its own."

Bierstedt did not recommend Parsons's book. He could not see in it an answer to the problems of sociology, let alone a "charter for sociology" as it would be hailed

¹ Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action. A Study in Social Theory with Special Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers* (New York: MacGraw Hill, 1937). The first part of the advertisement text ran: "This book . . . presents an analysis of the theory of the structure of social systems so far as they can be analyzed in terms of the 'theory of action,' taking the relation of means and ends as a starting point. The approach to the subject is new in that no one has previously attempted a comparable general analysis of this particular theoretical structure in its relation to empirical problems, nor has brought together the work of recent European writers in relation to this structure." See Parsons papers, HUG(FP)–42.8.2, box 2. The book's second edition was published by The Free Press, Glencoe, IL, in 1949, and its paperback edition by The Free Press/Collier Macmillan, New York, in 1968. The latter edition will be used throughout here, henceforth referred to as *Structure*.

² "Is Homo Sapiens? THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIAL ACTION. By Talcott Parsons. Reviewed by Robert Bierstedt," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, March 12, 1938, p. 18; the next three quotes are from the same page.

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at the end of the 1980s, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its publication.³ In the late 1930s, *Structure* appeared to Bierstedt, who himself had studied with Parsons, a far from satisfactory solution. “A sociology of the subjective” in the guise of Parsons’s voluntarism, Bierstedt commented in 1938, “is about as scientifically useful as a sonnet to a skylark, and the ‘voluntaristic theory of action’ would make William James – and probably Pareto – turn in his grave.”⁴

In his far more scholarly criticism, Louis Wirth, in the *American Sociological Review*, acknowledged that “the book goes beyond the scope of a mere commentary by treating each writer in the light of all of the others”⁵ and thus found it “highly interesting and helpful in the diagnosis of our present-day battle of theories – which, it may be added, is more than a battle of words.” But Wirth would not go along with Parsons any further. Albeit unconvinced, he realized that Parsons sought a synthesis derived from elements of the four oeuvres to delineate a realm for sociology beyond that of the economy or politics. But he charged that there were no grounds to envisage a sociology that would analyze a field of reality beyond other social sciences. Although Parsons’s “distinction between pure economics and sociology” made sense, he judged, Parsons’s conception of division of labor between, above all, politics and sociology could at best be “a crude formulation of differential emphasis.”⁶ In all, Wirth believed that the book offered least where it aimed to accomplish most. That is, in regard to the “better understanding of the meaning of rationality or of the role of rationality in society,”⁷ he saw no worthwhile contribution from the book.

A third reviewer, Floyd N. House, eventually reviewed both editions of *Structure*. In both reviews, however, he failed to understand the importance of the work. In 1939, he praised it for “the contribution it makes to the elucidation of the persistent and difficult problem of the place of values in social behavior.”⁸ In 1950, however, he was even less on the mark. He reminded his readers that he had reviewed the previous edition of which “the present edition . . . is simply an identical new printing, except for a new Preface of five and one-third pages.”⁹ Insisting that he was “in pretty thoroughgoing agreement with practically the whole of the author’s reasoning,” he also ventured a hypothesis to explain why the first edition of the book had had little influence on American sociology: “The reason for this seeming neglect of an important work is, I suspect, just what I anticipated in 1939: ‘It is unfortunate that it is so long and so abstruse in style; many American students of sociology who would profit by it will be deterred from reading it.’”

³ See, for instance, Charles Camic, “*Structure* After 50 Years. The Anatomy of a Charter,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 95, 1989, pp. 38–107.

⁴ “Is Homo Sapiens?,” p. 19.

⁵ “The Structure of Social Action. Review by Louis Wirth,” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 4, 1939, p. 400; the next quote is from the same page.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 402.

⁸ “The Structure of Social Action. Review by Floyd N. House,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 45, 1939/40, p. 129.

⁹ “The Structure of Social Action. Review by Floyd N. House,” *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 55, 1949/50, p. 505; the next two quotes are from the same page.

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Ironically, House erred in his prediction not in 1939 but in 1950. Though remaining unchanged and thus presumably still being “long” and “abstruse in style,” the book became an important source of sociological theory. In the 1950s and beyond, students apparently were no longer “deterred from reading it,” despite House’s verdict. Obviously, between the first and second editions of *Structure*, a majority of sociologists experienced a change of mind or heart. House was right in 1950 when he pointed out that the 1937 edition of *Structure* had reached only a small audience of American scholars. But House was wrong when he assumed that this would not change with the book’s reissue. The 1949 second edition became a success – despite the fact that the book, in 1949, was an “identical new printing, except for a Preface of five and one-third pages.” Indeed, it became mandatory reading in sociology courses during the next decade. By the 1970s, the book advanced to become a classic. It has been analyzed in a long stream of elaborate secondary accounts.¹⁰ The paperback edition, published in 1968, eventually spread the work around the globe. It became a milestone of sociology’s development as an academic discipline.

The Point of Politics

The difference in impact of the first and second editions of *Structure* raises the question hitherto unasked: What explains the conspicuously different reception of *Structure* before and after World War II?

This question, to be sure, presupposes that the reception of a book of social theory is related to the reception in the scientific community in sociology, or the social sciences in general. Are classics in a discipline related in some identifiable way to the historical or societal situation of the time in which they are appreciated for what they are? Do scholars make sense of social theory according to the perspective of the society of their day? My thesis is: Behind sociologists’ becoming fascinated with *Structure* after but not before World War II, lay a change in the historical situation in the decade between *Structure*’s two editions.

One salient aspect of the historical situation that was only emerging in 1937, or 1939, but had become flagrantly obvious in the late 1940s, was the defeat of fascism in Europe, especially National Socialism in Germany, through an alliance of fifty-two states in a war of historically unparalleled dimensions. Moreover, by the late 1940s, Nazi Germany had become a subject for analytical accounts concerning crimes unparalleled in the history of mankind. At the end of World War II, unspeakable crimes against humanity committed under the Nazi regime had been revealed to a horrified world public.¹¹ As of 1944–45, Nazi atrocities had

¹⁰ To name but two out of many such appreciations: Robert Bierstedt, *American Sociological Theory* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), and Donald Levine, *Visions of the Sociological Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), devoted an entire chapter to *Structure*.

¹¹ The American public was made aware of the atrocities committed in Nazi Germany through an extensive press campaign invited by Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe, Dwight D. Eisenhower, in the spring of 1945. See Norbert Frei, “‘Wir waren blind, ungläubig und langsam’. Buchenwald, Dachau und die amerikanischen Medien im Frühjahr 1945.” *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 35, 1987, pp. 385–401.

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become a verified truth that the postwar world had set out to explain in a long series of scholarly and literary accounts, extending until today.¹²

As of the latter half of the 1940s, I believe, an undeniably urgent need arose for a majority of contemporaries – including sociologists – to analyze National Socialism as a régime of terror. Although a steady flow of work since the 1930s had focused on the German dictatorship, I argue that the driving force behind *Structure's* reception after but not before World War II had to do with the political side of the book. My suggestion is: Not when it first appeared, but when it became a success after 1949, was the aim of *Structure* recognized, if indirectly. Parsons's intent in this book, I wish to maintain, was to make understandable why, from a scientific point of view, National Socialism was the obverse of democratic structure of social action.

Structure, written between 1933 and 1937 and continued through lectures, memoranda, and, eventually, articles on topics concerning Germany and the war, was a work related to the troubled times of the 1930s. When its second edition became successful, it provided sociologists in the post–World War II era with an answer to the question how a regime of terror could be conceptualized within a theory of the structure of social action.

My suggestion may appear to contradict Parsons's own concern with Max Weber's principle of *Wertfreiheit* separating politics from sociology. To be sure, Parsons himself was conscious of the apparent dilemma. When he replied to Louis Wirth's book review in an eight-page letter commenting on the latter's views on *Structure*, he made it clear that he fully agreed with Weber. To observe Weber's quest for value neutrality of social science did not mean that sociology should refrain from recognizing the undemocratic nature of authoritarian regimes. He asserted: "By distinguishing politics from sociology, I do not mean to imply that concrete power relationships have no relation to values."¹³ Despite the fact, in the tradition of Max Weber, that a political stance could not be taken by sociology, he felt that *Structure* involved a particular brand of politics. Recognition of the undeniably political nature of social relations in any historical or contemporary society could not be taken as outside the realm of sociology. That is, he followed Weber when he felt that the structure of social action was situated in the world of its day, either coercive control systems as in authoritarian regimes, or the voluntary curtailment of state power and establishment of citizens' rights in a *Rechtsstaat* enabling democracy in a modern societal community.

However, in his letter to Wirth, he explained what he saw his book achieving, in a language of caution against an all too facile positivism or empiricism:

¹² German accounts published shortly after the end of World War II included: Eugen Kogon, *Der SS-Staat. Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager* (Frankfurt: Fischer 1946), translated *The Theory and Practice of Hell. The German Concentration Camps and the System Behind Them* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Co., 1950), and Alexander Mitscherlich and Fred Mielke, *Das Diktat der Menschenverachtung* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1947), translated *Doctors of Infamy* (New York, 1949). American accounts included, for instance, Morris Janowitz, "German Reactions to Nazi Atrocities," *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 52, 1946, pp. 141–146.

¹³ Letter, Parsons to Louis Wirth, dated Oct. 6, 1939, p. 7; Parsons papers, HUG(FP) – 42.8.2, box 2; the next quote is from the same page.

The distinction is analytical and not a classification of concrete social structures. It is crucial to the methodological problem which I have followed through in terms of the status of economic theory that analytical systems such as economic theory or the corresponding type of sociology not only are not but cannot be adequate schemes for the analysis of classes of concrete phenomena for all purposes. On the contrary, there are sociological elements not only in the political world as we ordinarily understand it but in the economic world and vice versa.

The position in his book involved two ways in which methodology was a guide to the analysis of substantive tenets. On the one hand, the conceptual model of what constituted a fact and therefore apparently was taken for granted in an economic or social theory evidently had to be scrutinized. (In this vein, positivist utilitarianism failed the test of methodological modernity.) On the other hand, through theories that already had partly done the work of analyzing the contemporary world, the theories of “recent European writers” that required adopting rather than criticizing their conceptual achievements, an analytical perspective of voluntarism emerged.

In *Structure*, Parsons reconstructed insights taken from the four theories, arriving at two concluding chapters, one on substantive findings and the other on “tentative methodological implications.”¹⁴ His argument was factual when he emphasized that it was methodological. He refuted positivism as he proposed voluntarism. Particularly in the guise of social Darwinism, which he pronounced “dead” although it was far from dead in his time, he opposed utilitarian positivism. He addressed the thought of his time, in the guise of something “dead,” when he meant to destroy it thoroughly. He castigated the type of regime associated with “dead” social Darwinism (racism) when he meant to opt for its obverse, democracy in modern society. His own theory, termed voluntarism, claimed recognition, in Weberian terms, of the constructed nature of scientific concepts.

In the later years of his life, Parsons would admit to this knowledge interest of his earlier work. At the end of the 1960s, he admitted in two separate biographical accounts that he had been concerned about Germany when he wrote *Structure*. In the introductory notes to Part II of his *Politics and Social Structure*, a book that assembled his four most important articles on National Socialism published between 1942 and 1945, he recalled what had been his motives for concern:

I took my Ph.D. degree in 1927. This study in Germany was a crucial experience in my life. . . . At Heidelberg I came into contact with what most would regard as the very best of German culture. . . . By the time of my last visit to Germany prior to World War II, in the summer of 1930, much had changed. The Nazi movement was in full swing. . . . For all observers of social and political processes in the Western world of the time, the Nazi movement presented not only intellectual, but also profoundly moral, problems. Perhaps I can say that these were somewhat more poignant for me than for most other American intellectuals, not only because of my German experience, owing to the fact that I had come to love and respect that aspect of Germany which I had known. The critical question was, Why and how could this happen in what from so many points of view should be evaluated as a “good society”?¹⁵

¹⁴ This is the title of Chapter XIX.

¹⁵ Parsons, “Historical Interpretations (Introduction, Part II),” *Politics and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1969), pp. 59–60.

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In 1969, when contributing to a conference organized by *Daedalus*, the journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, recollecting his intellectual biography, and revealing his motives to write *Structure* in this memoir on his building social system theory, Parsons admitted that fascism in Germany had been a strong factual ground for him to study the structure of social action (he also referred to communism in Russia as another dictatorial regime which had been his target):

The Structure of Social Action marked a turning point in my professional career. Its major accomplishment, the demonstration of the convergence among the four authors with which it dealt, was accompanied by a clarification and development of my own thought about the problems of the state of Western society with which the authors were concerned. The state of Western society which might be designated as either capitalism or free enterprise – and on the political side as democracy – was clearly then in some kind of state of crisis. The Russian Revolution and the emergence of the first socialist state as controlled by the Communist party had been crucial to my thinking since undergraduate days. The Fascist movements affected friendships in Germany. Less than two years after the publication of the book the Second World War was to begin, and, finally, came the Great Depression with its ramifications throughout the world.¹⁶

On the note of real types of society, the modern welfare state could be contrasted with the then contemporary regime of National Socialism. The former, for Parsons, meant an integrated society, the latter anomie.

The Meaning of “Civics”

The text of the advertisement announcing the book in 1937 characterized it as “‘civics’ in the highest sense” – a theme not recognized in the book reviews on the occasion of the three editions. Interestingly, the characterization was made in the advertisement through a quote attributed to Joseph Schumpeter, whose comment was reproduced verbatim: “Whoever cares for the philosophy of social processes will find this volume . . . very stimulating reading. It contributes not only to a branch of scientific sociology but also to ‘civics’ in the highest sense.”¹⁷

Schumpeter, it appears, did indeed read the manuscript, if only in a previous version entitled *Sociology and the Elements of Human Action*. In a memorandum addressed to the Committee on Research in the Social Sciences at Harvard, praising

¹⁶ Parsons, “On Building Social System Theory: A Personal History,” *Daedalus*, vol. 99, 1970, pp. 826–882, cit. 831.

¹⁷ The full wording of the second half of the text of the advertisement was: “Professor Joseph Schumpeter of Harvard, commenting on this book, says: ‘The men who created that important body of ideas which lie at the back of modern political thought are, with the possible exception of Pareto, very imperfectly known to American readers. Professor Parsons presents the messages of some of them in a series of scholarly analyses, and winds up by welding them into a structure of his own. Whoever cares for the philosophy of social processes will find this volume . . . very stimulating reading. It contributes not only to a branch of scientific sociology but also to ‘civics’ in the highest sense.’” Parsons papers, HUG(FP) – 42.8.2, box 2.

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the book's ability to make accessible with "scholarly care"¹⁸ to an American audience German sources such as Weber's thought, Schumpeter pointed out that Parsons, by adding Durkheim to his exposition of Pareto and Marshall, rejected positivism, even in the original, Comtean, tradition.¹⁹ He added the comment that "both his introduction and his concluding chapters are eminently sensible and scholarly although I do not put them as high as those which are devoted to critical exposition."²⁰ Schumpeter, it seems, preferred Parsons's argument proposing voluntarism through convergence of the four theories to the latter's rebuttal of positivism. Parsons's "analytical realism,"²¹ to Schumpeter,²² obviously appeared less compelling than Parsons's "synthetic" conception of social action.²³

In 1936, Schumpeter noticed the book's antipositivism, although he did not find that to be its strongest achievement. Parsons, introducing his opposition to positivism in the guise of rejecting Herbert Spencer's sociology, adopted the stance vis-à-vis Spencer which he took from a then recent book written by a colleague of both Schumpeter's and Parsons's, Harvard historian Crane Brinton.

Parsons's opening paragraph expressed his rejection of positivist utilitarianism dismissing Spencer, through a quote from Brinton's *English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, first published in 1933.²⁴ The message was not only that Spencer's sociology was obsolete but indeed his political thought was dead.²⁵ Through Brinton's words, at the very beginning of the nearly eight hundred pages of *Structure*, Parsons stated not only that Spencer's work contained a political

¹⁸ "In re: Mr. Talcott Parsons's manuscript: *Sociology and the Elements of Human Action*. To the Committee on Research in the Social Sciences." Memorandum by J. A. Schumpeter, Department of Economics, Cambridge, Massachusetts, dated December 23, 1936, p. 1. The memorandum was kindly made available to me by Nico Stehr.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2; the two relevant sentences were: "The laborious disquisitions about Durkheim have, to me, opened many nooks and crannies in a system which I did not notice or understand before. It should be added that understanding Durkheim involves understanding the Comtean tradition from which much of his work arose and that Mr. Parsons seems to me to meet that test successfully."

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ See Parsons, *Structure*, p. 757.

²² Schumpeter might have had doubts about Parsons's "analytical realism" because Parsons insisted that "the employment of analytical categories drawn from more than one . . . system (of analytical categories), perhaps from several" might be required for "the adequate understanding of many concrete phenomena." Schumpeter, however, might have preferred that "only *one* system of analytical categories could be applicable to the understanding of any given concrete class of phenomena."

²³ Camic, who, in his commemorative essay written on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *Structure*, made reference to Parsons's self-characterization of his approach as "analytical realism," cited three locations where he thought this was being discussed. These were said to be indicated in the index. On closer inspection, however, two of these were not applicable. On the other hand, Camic failed to notice that Parsons himself in the index of *Structure* pointed out three locations as relevant for analytic realism; two of these were not recognized by Camic. See Camic, "Structure After 50 Years," p. 53; Parsons, "Structure," p. lv.

²⁴ Crane Brinton, *English Political Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949); (originally, 1933).

²⁵ Parsons's quote from Brinton read: "'Who now reads Spencer? It is difficult for us to realize how great a stir he made in the world. . . . He was the intimate confidant of a strange and rather unsatisfactory God, whom he called the principle of Evolution. His God betrayed him. We have evolved beyond Spencer.'" Parsons, *Structure*, p. 3; the next eight quotations are from the same page.

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conception of the structure of social action but also that this conception could be judged dead in the 1930s. He meant to imply that religious or even ritualistic forces were involved in the political philosophy of Spencer, which had to be proclaimed dead. He thus stated, through Brinton, that although Spencer previously, in the nineteenth century, had “made . . . a stir,” he now, in the 1930s, was obsolete and untimely. Parsons expressed interest in the “crime” that he assumed to have occurred as Spencer’s political philosophy ostentatiously was “dead.” By virtue of Brinton’s verdict assuming the air of a coroner inspecting a corpse, he dismissed the quality of Spencer’s political thought for the 1930s, though it had been adequate, presumably, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Appropriating the dismissal of a whole tradition of political thought which Brinton had argued, Parsons gained a platform from which to analyze the deadly flaws of “the positivistic-utilitarian tradition.”

In the two opening paragraphs, he did two things. First, he diagnosed the undeniable demise of quasi-religious doctrine as in Spencer’s political philosophy – which, as he presumed, belonged to the wider field of positivistic utilitarianism. He clad this statement rather whimsically in the words, regarding Spencer, that “a strange and rather unsatisfactory God, whom he called the principle of Evolution, . . . has betrayed him.” He then introduced his own program, using a reference to evolution but not Evolution. Upon the death of Spencer’s political philosophy following that of the latter’s “God,” Evolutionism, he pronounced, a nonpositivist, nonmechanistic theory of action had evolved. The latter, product of “the evolution of scientific theory,” was his own explanation of the structure of social action that would be shown in the book. At this early stage of his argument, he phrased his program in the language of a thriller: “We must agree with the verdict. Spencer is dead. But who killed him and how? This is the problem. . . . Spencer was . . . a typical representative of . . . the positivistic-utilitarian tradition. What has happened to it? Why has it died? The thesis of this study will be that it is the victim of the vengeance of the jealous god, Evolution, in this case the evolution of scientific theory.”

In a version of the preface written in September 1937 but abandoned at the request of his publisher, McGraw Hill, Parsons clarified that, originally, he had only been “interested in the empirical problems of economic individualism as they were treated by various authors.”²⁶ Only in the course of this work, he reported, had he discovered that the “four European writers” had independently come up with the same solution, which in turn made him examine their convergence. Whereas the primary emphasis of his study was now on “the emergence of the theoretical system,” he said, “it is, however, worth while noting that this was not the original emphasis.” He went on to remark, “Indeed it could not have been, for in the earlier stages of genesis of the study the author was not conscious that there was any such logically integrated system as the voluntaristic theory of action, least of all

²⁶ “Preface,” marked “Alstead, N.H. Sept. 15, 1937.” Parsons papers, HUG(FP) – 42.41, box 2, p. 5; the next two quotes are from the same page.

that the three principal writers treated in this study had converged on its main outline.”

In the published preface, he omitted this reference to his original view. He no longer mentioned that originally he had not suspected that there was a unifying reality behind the various views on economic individualism of the four authors. At the same time, in the published preface dated “October, 1937 Cambridge Mass.,” he emphasized more fully than in the unpublished version that what concerned him were empirical problems. These, he now knew, occupied him as well as the writers whose work he interpreted.

True scientific theory is not the product of idle “speculation,” of spinning out the logical implications of assumptions, but of observation, reasoning and verification, starting with the facts and continually returning to the facts. Hence at every crucial point explicit treatment of the empirical problems which occupied the writers concerned is included. Only by treating theory in this close interrelation with empirical problems and facts is any kind of an adequate understanding either of how the theory came to develop, or of its significance to science, possible.²⁷

He knew that such allegiance to facts meant that the scientific nature of the theory as it related to the facts had to be ascertained carefully.

In neither version of the preface, however, did he spell out the facts whose taking into account was to be the litmus test for the quality of the theory. He named some empirical problems relevant for himself as well as the authors he dealt with,²⁸ but he failed to concretize sufficiently the relevant empirical issues. He was rather parsimonious in sharing with the reader what were the empirically concrete structures of, for one, economic individualism in his time.

Hitherto unrecognized materials that have been preserved in the Harvard University Archives, however, may give a clearer picture of the empirical facts that his theory of the structure of social action aimed to fit. In a lecture presumably delivered at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, in March 1938, he apparently had contemporary structure(s) of social action in mind. His handwritten lecture notes carried subheadings such as “anomie,” “values,” “force,” among others, when he also dealt with German (Nazi) society.²⁹ He jotted down keywords that emulated *Structure* which had been recently published. These denoted clearly that Germany under National Socialism was on his mind when he used the key concepts of his voluntaristic theory. For the purpose of explicit sociological understanding, he contrasted Nazi Germany and the United States.

“Anomie,” for example, was a subheading on pages 1 as well as 3 of his lecture notes, which are here reproduced in the way in which he arranged the words on

²⁷ *Structure*, p. xxii.

²⁸ That is, “capitalism,” “free enterprise,” “economic individualism,” p. xxii.

²⁹ The lecture notes carry the headline “New Haven,” accompanied by the date “March 1938.” They are in the Parsons papers, HUG(FP) – 42.45.4, box 1. Other relevant lecture notes are marked “Gov 16, May 3 1938;” “Soc A May 3rd 1938;” or “Shop Club Feb. 16th 1938;” all preserved in Parsons papers, HUG (FP) – 42.45.4, box 1.

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his note sheet:

Anomie:
 Rapid industrialization
 Changing class structure
 Nationalism³⁰
 Jews
 Defeat & Humiliation
 Goals and Means³¹
 Anomie – a breakdown of institutional integration:
 Individualization
 Mobility – industrialization
 Nationalism as obverse
 Class structure – never entirely integrated
 Plan of Jews – Liberation not assimilation
 Rapid rise to national power. Defeat and humiliation.³²

In similar fashion, he listed “values” twice in his notes, detailing under two separate headings the following different themes:

Value – emotional-ideological side of Nazi Movement:
 A re-integration phenomenon
 Confusion – probably true to some extent of all revolutionary movements
 Obsessiveness – Jews. Communists – Foreign enemies – tendency to coalesce all.
 Paranoid tendency
 Ambivalence – esp. in attitudes to science + learning
 Mass neurosis? Abnormality reaction of normal people to abnormal social situation.³³
 Values –
 In Germany always more opposition to liberalism than elsewhere
 Authoritarian structures much undermined but little to replace.³⁴

One subheading referred to “force” where he noted:

Force – Pareto –
 Both internal and external applications. Success despite lack of unity.³⁵

Eventually, at the end of his notes, he included a summary:

Modern dictatorship largely a product of social disorganization.
 Consequences:
 Shift from universalistic to particularistic basis –
 Führerprinzip
 Race

³⁰ On the note sheet, this word was actually written on the margin in a way indicating where its place would be in the sequence of themes.

³¹ Unpublished notes entitled “New Haven,” p. 1. The capital letters in some of the words which would usually not be capitalized in English are Parsons’s own.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.