

what does it take to disrupt a market? She thinks hard about how sociological work on the creation of markets would have to be reformulated to think through the fragility of markets, and conducts a historical analysis of her two countries' policies using this framework.

Think how excited you would be if something like *this* crossed your desk. It is not going out on much of a limb to suggest that a piece of scholarship that does nothing more than describe a situation can always be made more interesting if pushed in a policy direction, because an orientation to solving the problem forces the analyst into a deeper confrontation with the issue - even if she abandons the search for solutions along the way because she discovers an intellectually exciting side path.

Finally, let me briefly address Steinmetz's observation that comparative historical sociology can barely reproduce itself. If this is true, surely part of the reason is that the idealistic young students who start sociology programs find themselves uninterested in a sub-discipline that does not seem to speak to their concerns about the shape of the world. A policy orientation will be good for the sub-discipline in intellectual as well as pragmatic terms.

### Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Isaac Martin, Peter Evans, and Richard Lachmann for comments on earlier versions of this essay.

### Deflem's Reply:

I thank colleagues George Steinmetz and Greta Krippner for contributing to this debate and am hopeful they are not embarrassed by my presence. Their ideas are divergent and not alone therefore useful. I leave judgments on the merit of their arguments to the reader, but offer

a few reflections on our respective positions.

The position of my programmatic essay is reasonably close to, or at least compatible with, the one George Steinmetz articulates in admirably historical-comparative terms. In his demarcation of 'is' and 'ought' questions, Steinmetz rightly makes a distinction between policy and (different kinds of) politics and dutifully brings out the relevance of the Mertonian notion of unintended consequences. I was pleased to see Steinmetz bring up the case of the *Polizeiwissenschaften*, which has been the subject of some of my own research. In that connection I must make the ironic observation that many contemporary proponents of attempts to marry sociology with non-sociology are almost completely ignorant of the distinctions between policy sociology, public sociology, applied sociology, sociological activism, and so on. The notion of a '*gute Policiey*' (good police), incidentally, does still today inform quite a bit of work in the balkanized field of criminology, an area that is, ironically mostly as a result of its policy-orientation, generally pooh-poohed among many mainstream sociologists. Steinmetz's comparative focus also lays bare the distinctly American character of the question that is before us. I agree that sociology is inevitably located in the political (and that the real problem is how this relationship should be developed) but also urge to think of sociology's location in broader terms to include the economic, the social, and the cultural, the latter of which I indeed understand in the most Durkheimian and Parsonsian sense possible.

Greta Krippner also tackles the question before us in a manner related more closely to the interests of the ASA section on Comparative and Historical Sociology than I do in my essay. She and others may be interested to learn that my initial attraction to sociology as an undergraduate was wholly dominated by a

social justice orientation, one that expressed itself in rather radical terms as a self-defined militant activist (with a handsome police detention record to show for it). My academic existence thereafter, however, was formed precisely by the lesson of sociology to see and practice the value of analysis, irrespective of normativity and policy alike. As to Krippner's more specific position statement, I must admit I know next to nothing about finance, least of all my own, but I commend her for the modesty of her project. Nonetheless, her position would still allow for sociology as a whole to step beyond the boundaries of scholarship. Underlying her answer on the limits of sociology in terms of policy, I even detect a desire on her part to develop a policy-relevant sociology, understood perhaps as a collective enterprise. But the same questions remain. Can such an attitude rely on any sociology-oriented policymakers? And given the long life of sociology today, why are we still addressing the question that is here before us?

### **Krippner's Reply:**

What is noteworthy to me about the preceding exchange is that the three invited essays all answer Prasad's query in the negative by offering almost completely distinct (and in some cases, mutually exclusive) arguments. Steinmetz suggests that attempts to directly intervene in policymaking threaten the tenuous autonomy of the subfield. We ought therefore approach policy warily, although Steinmetz is much more enthusiastic about comparative historical sociology's entanglements in politics, broadly defined. Deflem's negative reply to Prasad seems to be diametrically opposed to Steinmetz, suggesting that the appropriate disposition of the social scientist is one of detachment from politics and policy alike. My own negative response argues that comparative historical sociology's intellectual disposition is better suited to interrogating the normative

questions that frame policy than it is to directly attempting to make policy interventions. In this respect, I think I side with Steinmetz in privileging comparative historical sociology's political entanglements over involvement in policy per se, but it appears that I do so by violating Steinmetz's stricture against advocating an insufficiently elaborated ethics. That three scholars can all disagree while agreeing suggests that Prasad's question is generative indeed.

To respond briefly to Prasad's comment, if by "policy relevant" we mean the larger normative frameworks that embed policy formulation, then I agree that comparative historical sociology can and should be policy relevant. But this is not what I think most sociologists have in mind when they discuss "policy relevance," which refers to something that deals with, in Weber's terms, the means rather than the ends of action. In this regard, I do not think I pose a "false dichotomy" since social science has been organized around the distinction between means and ends at least since Weber proposed a "value-free" (social) science. To reiterate my position, the key issue is that the longer temporal scales typical of comparative historical research bring us on to the terrain of normative questions regarding the ultimate ends of our society (as opposed to the techniques we employ to achieve these ends), and in this regard historical research can serve to clarify the nature of the problems that we might seek to address as politically engaged sociologists. As I suggested in my essay, this is in part simply a matter of what comes into view at longer versus shorter time horizons, but it also reflects the fact that historical research and policymaking occur at a very different pace. In this regard, I sense an inherent tension in Prasad's insistence that comparative historical sociology be "up-to-the-minute" (as engagement with policy requires) and that it also address "big" questions. In my view, the biggest questions tend to be those we discern