

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 sociology 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

from across years, decades, and even centuries, not from yesterday's newspaper, policy brief, or blog post. In fact, this is for me precisely the appeal of historical research. It is not that I am indifferent to contemporary concerns; it is rather that the significance of contemporary

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events appears differently in historical perspective. It is over these longer expanses of time that it becomes possible to trace recurrent patterns, observe social institutions as malleable rather than natural, and acquire the necessary vantage point to reflect in a thoughtful way on our human condition.

My thanks to Monica Prasad for curating such a stimulating discussion!

### **Steinmetz's Reply:**

I would like to start by thanking Monica Prasad for giving me the chance to respond to her response to my brief comment. I want to start by responding directly to what I think are the most obvious distortions or misunderstandings of my argument and then try to clarify my arguments on four specific issues: ethics; the philosophy of historical social science; the different models of sociologists' interventions

in policy and politics; and the slightly diminished appeal of historical sociology in very recent years.

Part of the problem here is located in the confusion between (1) policy, (2) the political field proper, that is, the realm of electoral and party politics, and (3) political practices everywhere other than the political field. The word politics cannot be restricted to action in the political field. Politics means practices directed toward maintaining or subverting dominant, hegemonic, doxic, or orthodox beliefs and practices in any realm of practice. This is why the word politics in the phrase the "politics of method in the social sciences" (Steinmetz 2005) is not a metaphor. Prasad misunderstands my argument when she writes that "we should not confuse ourselves by calling a quest for knowledge for knowledge's sake "politics." Indeed, I did not, since I wrote that "good social science, including historical sociology, is already contributing to 'saving the world' simply by existing." You will note that I do not use the word politics here, since this a different argument about ethics and human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) and about knowledge as part of this flourishing. Social science of this sort, as knowledge seeking, becomes political when the conditions it is trying to explain are oppressive and maintained through distortive systems of knowledge. It can denaturalize social institutions by revealing their historicity and arbitrariness, and reveal the hidden interests served by normative orders. Social science also becomes political when it is forced into defending its right to exist, as when governments and other institutions try to turn it into policy science.

Prasad writes that "scholarship that is not explicitly studying the major issues of the day is, rather, part of a machinery of pacification of the public that works to reinforce the status quo." This is fundamentally wrong. If you limit your attention to the present you will