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# ***Sociology and Classical Liberalism***

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by

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*Abstract:* We advocate the development of a classical-liberal character within professional sociology. The American Sociological Association (ASA) is taken as representative of professional sociology in the United States. We review the ASA's activities and organizational statements, to show the association's leftist character. Internal criticism is often very uneasy about leftist domination of the field. We present survey results establishing that, in voting and in policy views, the ASA membership is mostly left-wing and devoid of classical liberalism. We sketch some ideas showing that sociology needs classical liberalism, and classical liberalism needs sociology.

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## Introduction

The sociology profession in the United States is a large tent displaying methods, purposes, and topics in great variety. Variety is severely truncated, however, in the matter of political ideology. It has long been observed that sociologists range from center to far left (in all varieties). There have never been more than a few classical liberals, libertarians, and conservatives in sociology since the days of William Graham Sumner. Today, their presence is nil, as shown by our recent survey of American Sociological Association (ASA) members. The classical-liberal character is virtually absent, and any few classical liberal denizens probably keep their views at least half hidden. We venture to say that self-reinforcing sorting mechanisms now make the discipline unapproachable by anyone who is unabashedly classical liberal.

We advocate the development of a classical-liberal character in sociology. Even social democrats should recognize classical liberalism as a venerable tradition. They should recognize that its anti-statist sensibilities remain a vibrant and valuable part of the general political culture. To say that classical liberalism is under-represented in sociology would be a vast under-statement. “Forbidden” might be more fitting. The lack of classical liberalism, in our view, has worked to the detriment of sociology and the public purposes that sociology presumably should be fulfilling.

Some people may think that sociology and classical liberalism just don’t mix. Leftist sociologists may suspect that the “individualism” of classical liberals blinds them to some of the fundamental categories and concerns of sociology, such as social integration, solidarity, community, identity, and alienation. Classical liberals may suspect that sociology is inherently “holistic,” “collectivist,” or “functionalist,” and

therefore inherently hostile to the idea of depoliticizing social affairs. Our position is that there is no essential tension between sociology and classical liberalism. Many classical-liberal formulations have powerful application in sociological topics, and many sociological insights and literatures can enrich classical liberalism. These claims are not speculation. Their validity is evident in classical-liberal works by Adam Smith, Alexis de Tocqueville, Herbert Spencer, William Graham Sumner – and many others. Such figures might have loomed large in sociology, alongside Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, if sociology had developed in a way that was not so entirely antipathetic to libertarian ideas.

This paper has three parts: (1) We relate recent controversies within the sociology profession, to show that some sociologists are very critical of the profession's ideological character. (2) We summarize the results of our survey of ASA members, providing hard data that shows the almost complete absence of classical liberals in the organization. (3) We sketch a few substantive ideas to indicate the promise of classical-liberal sociology.

### **Recent Controversy in the Sociology Profession**

Sociologists have excelled in subjecting themselves to sociological investigation. Some of this self-scrutiny has expressed discomfort about ideological uniformity. For example, in 1994 Seymour Martin Lipset published a rather lugubrious article about the state of sociology (Lipset 1994). We are confident that Lipset would agree that the virtual absence of classical liberals and conservatives has allowed leftist elements to become overbearing and domineering, a domination in the field bordering on groupthink.

Peter L. Berger says that “[t]he ideologues who have been in the ascendancy for the last thirty years have deformed science into an instrument of agitation and propaganda (the communists used to call this ‘agit-prop’) invariably for causes on the left of the ideological spectrum” (2002, 29). The ideological drift of professional sociology has been criticized by others, including Horowitz 1993 and Marsland 1988, the latter focusing on the United Kingdom. These problems show themselves plainly in recent events.

With currently more than thirteen thousand members, the ASA is probably representative of professional sociology in the United States. A great deal of controversy surrounds the ASA’s advocacy and politicking. For example, from 2003 to 2005, the ASA has:

- Submitted a brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in support of University of Michigan’s affirmative action policy.
- Passed (in 2003) by membership vote a resolution calling for an immediate end of U.S. military action in Iraq.
- Issued a statement urging defeat of a California proposition that would have ended public agencies’ abilities to collect data on citizens’ race, ethnicity, and national origin.
- Passed by membership vote a resolution opposing a U.S. constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages.
- Issued a statement condemning Lawrence Summers for his remarks about the possibility of innate difference playing a role in women’s representation in science and engineering.

The ASA leadership apparently feels that its members’ views are sufficiently uniform for the association to promulgate advocacy. Imagine that you are a classical liberal or

conservative who favors “color-blind” government policy and who feels that *maybe* innate differences between men and women can help explain achievement differences—and that your professional association is stumping against those sensibilities. In its politicking, the association shows disregard for differing perspectives, even driving them away or not allowing them.

The left-wing activism has been closely associated with “public sociology,” an agenda championed by University of California sociology professor Michael Burawoy, the ASA’s 2003-2004 president, who delivered a presidential address titled “For Public Sociology” (Burawoy 2005b). We find many sound insights in public sociology, such as that social sciences differ from the natural sciences in the way that learning is imparted and utilized—the social sciences are inherently cultural and “reflexive,” but we also see the significant here is the call for sociologists, and with ASA support, to engage in direct advocacy and politicking. Although Burawoy assured us that public sociology “has no intrinsic normative valence” (2005b, 8), a call to arms—especially when wielded by the nationwide organization—only really makes sense when the membership will not be fighting each other. He also made amply clear that the agenda is leftist: “The aspiration for public sociology is stronger and its realization ever more difficult, as sociology has moved left and the world has moved right” (2005b, 6). He seemed to be saying that the more that we sociologists fail to represent those who pay our salaries, the more we ought to propagate ideas they oppose. In another manifesto for public sociology appearing in *Critical Sociology*, Burawoy is explicit about the Marxist lineage of public sociology, and franker about the agenda:

We might say that critical engagement with real utopias is today an integral part of the project of *sociological socialism*. It is a vision of socialism that places

*human society, or social humanity* at its organizing center, a vision that was central to Marx but was too often lost before it was again picked up by Gramsci and Polanyi [citation omitted]. If public sociology is to have a progressive impact it will have to hold itself continuously accountable to some such vision of democratic socialism. (Burawoy 2005a, 325; emphasis in original)

Another telling aspect of the public-sociology campaign is the lack of recognition of what would seem to be the leading success story of public sociology, namely the neoconservatives' impact on public debate and policymaking. Significant in the neoconservative movement have been sociologists Nathan Glazer, Daniel Bell, Seymour Martin Lipset, and Irving Louis Horowitz, among others, none of whom seem to get much if any play by the advocates of public sociology.

The ASA's activism and promulgation of activist doctrine has provoked reaction. Satoshi Kanazawa resigned from the ASA and from his position as co-editor of *The Agora*, the newsletter of the ASA's "Rationality and Society" section. He explained his reasons as follows:

However, as I become increasingly less "American" [he is now based in London] and "Sociological," I have become less fit for a job of editing a newsletter for a section of the American Sociological Association. I have also become progressively more uncomfortable with the politicization of the ASA: The Iraq war resolution, the gay marriage resolution, the Burawoy presidency. However, absolutely the last straw for me was the recent statement, passed unanimously by the ASA Council, on the Larry Summers affair [citation deleted]. As an evolutionary psychologist, I cannot afford to be part of a political organization which willingly promotes and spreads such a lie. I have therefore decided to resign from the ASA. (Kanazawa 2005)

Kanazawa's unease as an evolutionist speaks of sociologists' long-standing aversion to sociobiology and other evolutionary research (see Hopcroft 2005)—research that often upsets leftist ideas and sentiments.

In 2004, François Nielson, a sociology professor at Chapel Hill, published in *Social Forces* a thoughtful and biting criticism of Burawoy, public sociology, and ASA activism. He argued forcefully that Burawoy is wrong to impute a common political agenda for sociologists, that public sociology is a watered-down version of Marxist activism, and that, at any rate, direct activism is not only outside the ASA's purview, but embarrassing to and destructive of the association's scholarly and professional purposes. Nielson added that "Professional sociologists may well view the public sociologists' emphasis on moral and political values as a potential motive, and ready-made pretense, for disregarding professional standards of scholarship and persecuting researchers who have dared come up with politically incorrect findings" (Nielson 2004, 6).

The same issue of *Social Forces* carried a piece by Charles R. Tittle, "The Arrogance of Public Sociology." A sociology professor at North Carolina State, Tittle wrote that public-sociology advocates "seem to think that what is 'socially just' is clear and easily agreed upon among people with good will and sociological training." Yet, "sociologists are as likely to be wrong as right and in the process they can easily cause damage" (Tittle 2004, 1640, 1641).

ASA trends have another vocal critic in University of South Carolina sociology professor Mathieu Deflem. In 2004, he wrote in the ASA's newsletter *Footnotes*:

The recent abuse of the ASA resolutions process and the political drift it betrays in the ASA are indicative of a sad development in contemporary U.S. sociology. . . . Although the resolution [concerning gay marriage] was presented as "member-



initiated,” it was in fact ASA President Burawoy who first initiated the idea in March 2004 when he emailed the chairs and chairs-elect of the ASA sections on Sex and Gender, Sexualities, and Family and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Caucus upon discussion of the issue with the ASA Council. (Although a constitutional issue was raised, the Sociology of Law section was not informed.) Even in presenting the resolution, the ASA President and Council violated procedures of democratic governance, acting as some mighty politburo which feels that the “full membership should have the opportunity to express itself” only after the Council made sure to express itself on a resolution it had instigated. . . . But in the ASA there is little or no debate allowed. Worse yet, judging from some of the private emails I have received, there are several people in the ASA—especially graduate students—who are afraid to speak out publicly for fear of retaliation. As the ASA police is already here, I cannot entirely blame them. . . . The non-sociological drift in the ASA entails a corruption of sociology to further a particularistic political agenda. President Burawoy is clear about his political intentions. (9)

Deflem has also decried editor Judith Blau’s decision to alter editorial practices at the journal *Social Forces* (which is associated, not with the ASA, but with the Southern Sociological Society), namely, to include a new section devoted to solicited works in public sociology and a new e-publications devoted to public-sociology pieces—“fresh, new, provocative—but without having gone through the lengthy review process” (Blau 2004, 459-60). Deflem criticized the new editorial regime, adding: “Public sociologists invoke discussion, to be sure, but only within the confines of a platform that shares a basic understanding of public sociology as an attempt to connect sociology with selected matters of public debate . . . Public sociology is a form of political activism and an

attempt to redefine sociology accordingly” (2005, 13).<sup>1</sup> And he announced the cancellation of his subscription to the journal. He now maintains a “Save Sociology” Web site (savesociology.org), “developed in response to the various forms of attack on sociology as an academic discipline, especially since the advent of so-called ‘public’ sociology.”

### **Hard Data on ASA Ideology**

The foregoing makes clear that the leadership of the ASA is staunchly left-wing. What about the rank and file? According to François Nielson, “Notwithstanding Burawoy’s blanket assessment of the sociological profession as being politically ‘left,’ the moral-political agenda of individual sociologists are diverse” (2004, 4). Well, is that true?

Our survey of ASA members addresses this question of ideological diversity in the ASA. In March and April 2003, we surveyed 1,000 randomly selected US ASA members. The survey controller received back 351 nonblank surveys returned, a response rate (adjusting for postal returns, and so on) of 35.2 percent.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, a new Editor of *Social Forces* has been appointed and the public sociology section is to be terminated.

<sup>2</sup> At the Survey Homepage one may view a sample survey and documents explaining the methods, independent control, and certification of the survey results. The Survey Homepage URL is <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/economics/klein/survey.htm>.

## Upwards of 85 percent of ASA Members Vote Democrat or Green

The voting question was worded as follows: To which political party have the candidates you've voted for in the past ten years mostly belonged? The responses are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

*To which political party have the candidates you've voted for in the past ten years mostly belonged?*

	Frequency	Percent
Democratic	288	82.1
Republican	18	5.1
Green	8	2.3
Libertarian	0	0.0
Respondents checking more than one option		
Green/ Democratic	5	1.4
Democratic/Republican	0	0.0
Libertarian/Republican	1	0.3
Diffuse (checked 3 or more)	5	1.4
Other (w/o comment)	4	1.1
Other: "Cannot vote"	4	1.1
Other: "Do not vote"	0	0.0
Non-response	18	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>100</b>

The Democrat to Republican ratio is 16 to 1. A 2001 Brookings Institution survey of ASA members with 115 respondents found a ratio of 47 to 1 (Brookings 2001). In a smaller 1999 sample of sociology professors, Rothman, Lichter, and Nevitte (2005) found 59 Democrats and zero Republicans. These findings agree with voter-registration investigations. For example, Cardiff and Klein (2006) find that in the sociology departments of eleven California universities there are 88 registered Democrats and two

registered Republicans. The voter-registration data helps to assure us that the ASA is representative of sociology professors in general.

The survey was also administered to five other social-science associations. Of the six fields surveyed, voting Democratic is most preponderant among the anthropologists and sociologists, who both have a Democrat to Republican ratio of more than 15 to 1. The range in the history, political and legal philosophy, and political science fields is 6 to 1. The least preponderant is Economics, but even there the ratio is about 2.5 to 1. Most the ratios go up significantly, however, when we consider only the ASA’s *academic* members.<sup>3</sup>

### Republicans Are Sorted Out of Academia

Our data speaks to the controversial questions about whether Republicans tend to be sorted out of academia. We asked whether the respondent’s primary employment is (or had been) academics or other areas of employment (public sector, private sector, or independent research). Correspondingly, we sorted by whether a respondent is in or out academics (Table 2).

TABLE 2

*Republicans are more likely to land outside of academia (N=297)*

	ASA member is employed in		% outside academia
	Academia	Not in academia	
votes Democratic	224	64	22.2
votes Republican	8	10	55.6
D-to-R ratio	28 to 1	6.4 to 1	

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<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of ASA and American Anthropological Association members’ policy views broken down by voting, see Klein and Stern 2004; for a more general comparison of survey results from the six associations, see Klein and Stern 2006; for some provisional evidence that there is some Democrat membership bias in such associations (the American Economics Association is investigated), see Klein (2006).

Table 2 shows that the number of ASA members in academia is more than four times that of those outside of academia. The difference between the Democrat-to-Republican ratios in academia and not in academia is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. If the ratios we found are reliable, they would mean that, *although a Democratic-voting ASA member has a 22.2 percent chance of landing outside of academia, a Republican-voting ASA member has a 55.6 percent chance of landing outside of academia.* The mechanisms at work might be ideological discrimination or self-sorting. All respondents are ASA members—85 percent with PhDs—so clearly there is more going on than the alleged non-interest of Republicans in ideas and scholarship.

### **Policy Views: The Substance of Ideological Character**

Our specific concern in this article is with classical liberalism, and one could observe that Republicans typically are not classical liberal, so their absence is not germane to the main question. Moreover, one might argue that Democrats can be classical liberal, or at least diverse politically. Our data on the 18 policy questions we asked shows, however, that classical liberalism is virtually absent from the ASA.

For the 18 questions about public policy issues, the following query about tariffs shows the format:

Tariffs on imported goods to protect American industries and jobs:

- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| support<br>strongly      | support<br>mildly        | have mixed<br>feelings   | oppose<br>mildly         | oppose<br>strongly       | Have no<br>opinion       |

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

The numbers 1 through 5 did not appear in the survey. They show how we weighted each response when creating an index (or mean response).

We present the results on the 18 policy questions in three groups: economic regulations (table 3), regulation of personal choices (table 4), and role of government (table 5).

TABLE 3  
*Sociologists' views on economic regulations*  
*N=351, frequency (percent)*

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>			
<i>Government Activism</i>	<i>Support strongly</i>	<i>Support mildly</i>	<i>Have mixed feelings</i>	<i>Oppose mildly</i>	<i>Oppose strongly</i>	<i>Have no opinion</i>	<i>No response</i>	<b>Mean value (St.D)</b>
Tariffs to protect American industries	18 (5.1)	62 (17.7)	109 (31.1)	87 (24.8)	66 (18.8)	3 (0.9)	6 (1.7)	3.35 (1.14)
Minimum wage laws	305 (86.9)	20 (5.7)	15 (4.3)	4 (1.1)	2 (0.6)	0 (0.0)	5 (1.4)	1.20 (0.62)
Occupational safety regs (OSHA)	306 (87.2)	29 <sup>4</sup> (8.3)	8 (2.3)	3 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (1.4)	1.15 (0.48)
Pharmaceutical market regulation (FDA)	265 (75.5)	42 (12.0)	30 (8.5)	5 (1.4)	2 (0.6)	2 (0.6)	5 (1.4)	1.36 (0.75)
Air and water regulation (EPA)	318 (90.6)	23 (6.6)	3 (0.9)	2 (0.6)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (1.4)	1.10 (0.38)
<i>Economic Regulation index, Mean (and St.D):</i>								1.63 (0.41)

On tariffs (table 3), sociologists are distributed around the center position and lean toward opposition, but they are generally supporters of all the other economic regulations, and most are strong supporters. We see in table 4 that sociologists are strong

<sup>4</sup> One respondent checked both “strongly support” and “mildly support;” counted as the latter.

supporters of government restrictions on discrimination and guns, but are quite mixed on drugs, prostitution and gambling laws.

TABLE 4  
*Sociologists' views on public policies concerning regulations of personal choices*  
*N=351, frequency (percentage)*

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>			
<i>Government Activism</i>	<i>Support strongly</i>	<i>Support mildly</i>	<i>Have mixed feelings</i>	<i>Oppose mildly</i>	<i>Oppose strongly</i>	<i>Have no opinion</i>	<i>No response</i>	<b>Mean value (St.D)</b>
Discrimination controls	315 (89.7)	9 (2.6)	15 (4.3)	4 (1.1)	3 (0.9)	0 (0.0)	5 (1.4)	1.18 (0.64)
Controls on "hard" drugs	110 (31.3)	58 (16.5)	78 <sup>5</sup> (22.2)	47 (13.4)	46 (13.1)	1 (0.3)	11 (3.1)	2.58 (1.40)
Prostitution controls	41 (11.7)	52 (14.8)	105 (29.9)	78 (22.2)	65 (18.5)	2 (1.6)	8 (2.3)	3.22 (1.25)
Gambling restrictions	59 (16.8)	87 (24.8)	85 (24.2)	59 (16.8)	45 (12.8)	8 (2.3)	8 (2.3)	2.82 (1.28)
Gun control	255 (72.6)	37 (10.5)	22 (6.3)	12 (3.4)	15 (4.3)	0 (0.0)	10 (2.9)	1.52 (1.06)
<b>Regulation of Personal Choice Index, Mean (and St.D):</b>								2.26 (0.72)

TABLE 5  
*Sociologists' views on public issues concerning the role of government*  
*N=351, frequency (percentage)*

	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>			
<i>Government Activism</i>	<i>Support strongly</i>	<i>Support mildly</i>	<i>Have mixed feelings</i>	<i>Oppose mildly</i>	<i>Oppose strongly</i>	<i>Have no opinion</i>	<i>No response</i>	<b>Mean value (St.D)</b>

<sup>5</sup> One respondent checked both "mildly support" and "mildly oppose;" counted as "have mixed feelings."

Government ownership of enterprise	43 (12.3)	62 (17.7)	119 (33.9)	51 (14.5)	60 (17.1)	5 (1.4)	11 (3.1)	3.07 (1.25)
Redistribution	243 (69.2)	57 (16.2)	27 (7.7)	6 (1.7)	4 (1.1)	5 (1.4)	9 (2.6)	1.43 (0.81)
Government production of schooling (k thru 12)	218 (62.1)	33 <sup>6</sup> (9.4)	37 (10.5)	10 (2.8)	13 (3.7)	7 (2.0)	33 (9.4)	1.15 (0.48)
Tuning the economy by monetary policy	104 (29.6)	119 (33.9)	74 (21.1)	16 (4.6)	3 (0.9)	21 (6.0)	14 (4.0)	2.04 (0.92)
Tuning the economy by fiscal policy	108 (30.8)	119 (33.9)	67 (19.1)	17 (4.8)	5 (1.4)	25 (7.1)	10 (2.9)	2.03 (0.96)
Tighter controls on immigration	42 (12.0)	38 (10.8)	63 (17.9)	90 (25.6)	113 (32.2)	0 (0.0)	5 (1.4)	3.56 (1.36)
Military aid/presence abroad	30 (8.5)	48 (13.7)	89 (25.4)	52 (14.8)	121 (34.5)	1 (0.3)	10 (2.9)	3.54 (1.33)
Foreign aid (World Bk, IMF, USAID)	137 (39.0)	65 (18.5)	95 (27.1)	17 (4.8)	25 (7.1)	3 (0.9)	9 (2.6)	2.19 (1.23)
<i>Role of Government Index (includes the 8 issues above), Mean (and St.D.):</i>								2.45 (0.52)
<i>Public Policy Index (includes all 18 issues), Mean (and St.D.):</i>								2.17 (0.38)

The forms of government activism most opposed by sociologists is the tightening of immigration controls and military action abroad (table 5). They are more centered on government ownership of enterprise. They generally support foreign aid, monetary policy, and fiscal policy. Most sociologists strongly support redistribution and the government production of schooling.

Overall, sociologists overwhelming support (and mostly strongly) economic interventions, gun control, redistribution, government schooling, and discrimination controls. That is, they are predominately left-wing.

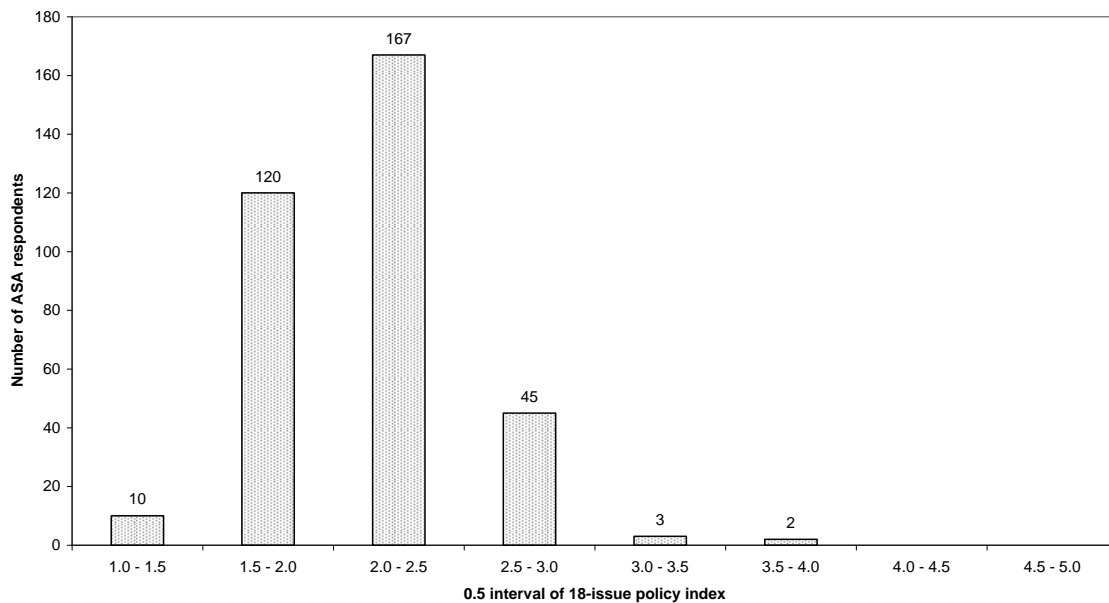
<sup>6</sup> One respondent checked both “support strongly” and “support mildly;” counted as “support mildly.”



## There Are Virtually No Classical Liberals in the ASA

Classical liberalism is a political persuasion that is extremely suspicious of government intervention, across the board. Thus, classical liberals would usually (not necessarily always) respond to the 18 forms of government activism with “oppose mildly” (numerically scored as 4) or “oppose strongly” (numerically scored as 5). Accordingly, it is fair to say that only those with an overall average above 4.0 on the 18 questions can really be counted as classically liberal. So, what percent of the ASA membership can be deemed classical liberal?

Figure 1: Distribution of 18-issue policy index scores of ASA survey respondents



This question is answered by Figure 1, which shows the distribution of 347 respondents by overall policy score. As we can see, over 98 percent of the sample has a score below 3.0, and not a single member has a score above 4.0. It appears that the number of classical liberals belonging to the ASA is approximately zero.

## **The Need for More Classical-Liberal Sociology**

There are many people better qualified than we to sketch out the need for more classical-liberal sociology. The foregoing evidence, however, invites an attempt to make that need plausible, so we sketch some ideas for classical-liberal sociology. We do not mean to provide a research agenda, nor to suggest that the sketched ideas are original or as yet undeveloped. Our own awareness of the literature is unexceptional, but even we recognize that many of these ideas – though *underdeveloped* and *underappreciated* – nonetheless have significant literatures behind them – in the library stacks and in current research. Citing articles and books that represent classical-liberal sociology would place upon us a scholarly responsibility that we do not wish to assume and that would alter the tone of these remarks. Hence, the following remarks contain no citations whatsoever.

### The voluntary/coercive distinction

If there is one analytic distinction that sociology could better understand, it is that between voluntary and coercive action. This distinction is rooted in a logic of property and consensual agreement, a logic that holds all ordinary commercial and market activity to be strictly voluntary. The primary locus of coercion is government, and business corporations avail themselves of coercion only to the extent that they get government power to do their bidding. In contrast, much of sociology has tended to make primary a distinction between community and

commercial society, between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*. When sociologists incorporate the category “civil society” in their work, it usually is something separate from business and markets. Classical liberals tend to take *civil* to mean “voluntary,” and hence to see civil society as including business and trade. They feel that left-leaning sociologists often err by overstating the distinction between markets and communities/civil society. Classical liberals see markets, networks and communities as intertwined, and all residing in the voluntary realm.

Correspondingly, classical liberals would fault left-leaning sociologists for tending to associate community and solidarity with politics and government, and for failing to recognize the coercion in intervention and progressive policies. What is essential to government is the kind of action that would be criminal if undertaken by any other agent in society (suppose your neighbor decided to impose a minimum-wage law on you).

#### The interrelations between commerce and community

Relieved of left-wing tendencies, sociologists could enrich our understanding of how commerce and business interrelate with social institutions and communities, for example in assuring trustworthiness and providing public goods. Sociologists might help to explain how the social and the economic have been bifurcated by government intervention – for example, by occupational licensing and tax-law. In the nineteenth century, there was no clear distinction between community

enterprise and business enterprise, but modern rules have created an unnatural separation.

### The role of privilege, prestige, status, and power in “rent-seeking”

Many economists and political scientists use the term “rent-seeking” to denote lobbying for government favors and largesse. The emphasis has been on material benefits. Economists are ill-equipped to explain how prestige, status, and coercive power interact with privilege, how they motivate privilege-seeking, and how they legitimate the privileges obtained. Sociologists could vastly enrich our understanding of the ethos and mentality of “rent-seeking”, and, correspondingly, enrich their own understanding of prestige and distinction by linking them directly to privilege rendered by government—rendered, that is, by coercing the non-privileged, for example arresting them for styling hair without a license. Indeed, economists and political scientists often fail to find a smoking gun in material “rents”, and instead suggest as an unexplained afterthought that prestige, status, and ideology are more important determinants of government policy.

### Instincts and coping with the modern world

The social thought of Smith, Spencer, Sumner, and Hayek is highly evolutionary and very much in tune with modern evolutionary research: In the past 50,000 years, our genes have not changed but society has, vastly. Our evolved instincts – as well as our household/family heuristics – often do not fit the modern world.

Leftist mentalities have tended to find fault with the modern world, rather than with man's instincts, and correspondingly have been averse to evolutionary theory. Sociologists might tame their left-wing tendencies and help us understand how people learn to cope with the modern world. Rather than rejecting various inequalities and things that feel like social injustices, they could explain how people can and do respond to such feelings, adapt them to modern life, and sometimes overcome them. Rather than urging statist "corrections" for the modern world, sociologists might assume the therapeutic character of Smith and Hayek, by educating for happiness with modernity.

#### Improving and testing the Hayekian narrative

The Hayekian narrative does not end with the modern world upsetting evolved instincts. Hayek tells of the re-assertion of the primordial in the form of social-democratic statism. Spencer and Sumner, too, saw modern statism as a kind of atavism—the reversion to force—but Hayek more specifically writes of how democracy helps to give an encompassing organizational ethos to the modern mass polity, revivifying the collectivist values and sentiments of the primordial band or tribe. The testing and improving of these ideas are clearly jobs for sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, as well as political scientists and historians.

#### The sociology of statism

Classical liberalism has generally done a bad job of explaining why, if it is such a good thing, it went into decline, and, in current decades of intellectual revival, has generally failed to reduce the scope and intrusiveness of government in the more developed countries. Materialist theories of “rent-seeking” are clearly inadequate. The answers to the failure are cultural, and sociologists are especially fit to explain how groupthink, indoctrination, preference falsification, conformity, obedience, acquiescence, cognitive dissonance, and other social mechanisms can bring about and preserve statism to an extent far in excess of its true desirability. Sociologists are especially fit to explain how people look to government for *validation*, and hence how social movements become politicized and governmentalized. Classical liberalism is sorely lacking its political sociologists.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Classical liberalism is a vital, incisive point of view. Reaching back to John Locke, it is a core strand of social thought. Every social science and humanities discipline should within its tent warmly nurture the classical-liberal character.

Internal criticism of sociology is often very uneasy about leftist domination of the field. We have presented survey results indicating that the ASA membership is mostly left-wing and nearly devoid of classical liberalism. ASA members favor economic regulations, gun control, anti-discrimination laws, public schooling, and redistribution, and are moderate or mixed on tariffs, foreign aid, drugs, prostitution, and gambling laws.

They lean against military endeavors. Overwhelmingly, they vote Democratic. Evidence strongly suggests that, relative to sociologists who vote Democratic, sociologists who vote Republican are much more likely to land outside of academia.

At present, the sociology profession needs classical liberalism as a counterpoise to its excessive leftism. We sketched some ideas to suggest that sociology needs classical liberalism, and that classical liberalism needs sociology.

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