THE LEGACY AND FRONTIERS OF SOCIOLOGY
In planning the session about “The Legacy of Sociology” at the 37th World Congress of the International Institute of Sociology, the organizers certainly had more in mind than a mere combination of representatives from different national sociological traditions when they decided to invite Margaret Archer, Raymond Boudon, and myself. They had good reasons to assume that Margaret Archer’s critical realism and Raymond Boudon’s open-minded version of a rationalistic action theory deserve to be called creative continuations of important strands of the sociological tradition. But what exactly could my role be in the dramaturgical plot they probably had in mind? In my sociological work, I see myself as deeply influenced by at least two different national traditions, namely the German tradition of historicism and hermeneutics on the one hand and the American tradition of pragmatism on the other. Two questions therefore arise immediately: 1. Can one be a representative of both these traditions at the same time? And 2. What exactly is the relationship of these two originally non-sociological traditions to “the legacy of sociology”? Let me first attempt to give brief answers to these two questions; I will thereafter try to exemplify my specific approach based on these two traditions in the field of my current research on the history of human rights.

I will start with the second question. There is no doubt that the philosophies of pragmatism and of hermeneutics influenced classical sociology, at least to some extent. Much has been written about the importance of pragmatism for the Chicago school of sociology, for example in W. I. Thomas, Robert Park, and, of course, the social psychology of George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley and its continuation in symbolic interactionism. But pragmatism never became fully integrated into Talcott Parsons’ ambitious attempt at theoretical synthesis, and for what really constituted the dominant

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1 See, for example, my own attempt: Joas 1993, 14–51.