



The Emergence of Sociological Theory

Fifth Edition

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Preface

The first edition of *The Emergence of Sociological Theory* was published in early 1981. At that time, our goal was to examine the first one hundred years of sociological theorizing—roughly the period between 1830 and 1930. In particular, we sought to communicate the explanatory power of each theorist's ideas. We visualized the early masters as scientists who sought to understand the operative dynamics of human action, interaction, and organization. Of course, not all the masters saw themselves as scientists but, except for Karl Marx and Max Weber, most founders of sociology believed in the epistemology of science. And, despite differences in their respective commitments to science, all of the theorists of sociology's first one hundred years discovered some of the fundamental properties and processes of the social universe. Our intent back in the 1970s was to highlight their respective discoveries of these properties and processes.

Over the years, the goals of the book have remained unchanged: to summarize the basic works of each theorist and to pull the explanatory models and principles from these works. This book has always summarized each theorist's ideas in great detail. We have never “watered down” the reviews of a theorist's basic works; rather, we have tried to present ideas in their full complexity, although we have also sought to do so in simple language. Ironically, when ideas are watered down or summarized too briefly, they become less understandable than when they are reviewed in their most robust form. In this new edition, we state the theorists' ideas in even more straightforward prose and provide thorough summaries of core ideas because we feel that this is the best

way to understand the argument of a theorist. What has always distinguished *The Emergence of Sociological Theory* is a commitment to present the ideas of theorists in detail. When the details of arguments are reviewed, it becomes possible to see the ideas of the early masters as real theory—that is, as explanatory models and propositions. This mode of analysis is not everyone's cup of tea, of course, but our view is that these classical thinkers are read and re-read today because we sense the explanatory power of their ideas. And so, in our minds, it is appropriate to make the explanations more explicit.

New Tri-Chapter Organization

Classical theory can be taught in many ways. One method is to review the texts of the early masters in their intellectual contexts. Another is, to isolate the enduring theoretical ideas of a thinker and state these in more modern terms as models and principles. In this fifth edition of the *Emergence of Sociological Theory*, we try to accomplish all these goals, but in separate chapters so that readers can pick and choose which approach they wish to take. With the exception of Auguste Comte, who articulated a vision for sociology but little real theory, we devote three chapters to each theorist. The first of the three chapters is the biography of the theorist and the intellectual influences on that theorist's thinking. The second chapter summarizes the theorist's core works; as we have emphasized, this summary is detailed so that readers can understand the full complexity of the argument. We also use graphics to help the reader visualize complex ideas. The third chapter—new to this edition—goes beyond a summary of the theorist's works. This additional chapter for each theorist presents the underlying theory of a master as a model in which the key forces and their causal relations to each other are diagrammed. This kind of modeling is complex, especially when we present a scholar's entire scheme as one model. Still, it is useful to see a theory in its most robust form, and by presenting the overall theory, we can appreciate the entire theoretical scheme of a scholar as it evolved over time. For many theorists, we present separate causal models for particular aspects of their overall schemes, and these more focused models are generally much simpler. In all, we have developed twenty-four causal models that, we believe, allow us to see the complex causal arguments developed by sociology's early masters. These models have stood the test of time, and indeed, they are still relevant. At the close of this new third chapter, we present a master's theoretical ideas as a series of elementary propositions that are, in principle, testable. By presenting a theory in these two formats—complex causal models and abstract principles—the power of the theory is revealed. We recognize that, to many, this kind of exercise imposes the epistemology of science and more modern theoretical formats onto older discursive texts. While this charge is true, we believe that the enduring power of a scholar's ideas resides in the elegance of the theory as it can be expressed as a causal scheme or as a series of principles. This is why these scholars are still important as theorists rather than solely as historical figures who founded the discipline. These thinkers speak

to us today because they developed scientific theories that are easily extracted from their discursive texts.

This tri-chapter organization of the book presents several options for teaching a course on the history of sociological theory. If a “text-in-historical context” approach is desired, then the first two chapters on a theorist can be used and the third chapter omitted. If a purely textual approach is desired, then the second chapter on each theorist can be emphasized, perhaps excluding the first and third chapters. If a more scientific emphasis is desired, then the third chapter on a theorist can be stressed, typically after reading the second chapter summarizing the arguments presented by the theorist’s basic texts. And, of course, all these options can be combined into a very complete analysis of early theorizing in sociology. We have made the chapters modular, so each can stand alone. As a result, an instructor can pick and choose how to present the materials to students.

Changes in this Edition

To summarize the essential changes in this edition:

- A new third chapter on each major theorist has been added. This chapter presents the theories of the early masters as causal models, depicted visually and as abstract theoretical principles.
- Many new diagrams, tables, and other visual aids have been added, not only in the third chapter on each theorist but also throughout the text.
- The book is now more modular, presenting instructors with various options for what they want to emphasize: history of ideas in context, summaries of basic texts, or underlying theoretical models and principles.
- A new chapter on the nature of science and scientific theory has been added, particularly for those who want to pursue the analysis of the first masters as theorists who articulated enduring theoretical models and principles.
- Each chapter has been somewhat reorganized, particularly those on Marx and Weber. Other chapters have been shortened somewhat, especially those on Spencer and Comte.
- The writing style has been simplified, but not to the point of oversimplifying complex arguments by the early theorists.
- A new companion Web site has been added. Additional materials can be accessed via this site, including a discussion of how the early masters’ ideas have been carried forward into contemporary theory. Moreover, the Web site will be constantly updated.

This is the most complete revision of the book since it was written in the 1970s. We have added many new materials and features but not abandoned the original goal of reviewing the theoretical ideas of the first sociologists in the context of their times and for their contributions to the development of cumulative scientific theory.

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Contents

PREFACE xvii

ABOUT THE AUTHORS xxi

**1 THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND NEW WAYS
OF THINKING 1**

The Enlightenment 2

The Political Economy of the Enlightenment 4

The Emergence of Sociology 6

**2 AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE EMERGENCE
OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY 7**

The Strange Biography of August Comte 7

The Intellectual Origins of Comte's Thought 10

Montesquieu and Comte 10

Turgot and Comte 12

Condorcet and Comte 14

Saint-Simon and Comte 15

Liberal and Conservative Trends in Comte's Thought	18
<i>Liberal Elements in Comte's Thought</i>	18
<i>Traditional Elements in Comte's Thought</i>	18
The Sociology of Auguste Comte	19
<i>Comte's Early Essays</i>	20
<i>Comte's Course of Positive Philosophy</i>	21
<i>Comte's View of Sociological Theory</i>	21
<i>Comte's Formulation of Sociological Methods</i>	23
<i>Comte's Organization of Sociology</i>	25
<i>Comte's Advocacy of Sociology</i>	29
Critical Conclusions	30
Notes	31
3 THE EARLY MASTERS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR SCIENTIFIC THEORY	34
Science as a Belief System	34
What Is Theory?	37
<i>Concepts</i>	37
<i>Statements</i>	38
<i>Theoretical Formats</i>	39
The Emergence of Sociological Theory	42
4 THE ORIGIN AND CONTEXT OF HERBERT SPENCER'S THOUGHT	43
Biographical Influences on Spencerian Sociology	43
The Political Economy of Nineteenth-Century England	47
The Scientific Milieu of Spencer's England	48
<i>Influences from Biology</i>	48
<i>Influences from the Physical Sciences</i>	50
Spencer's Synthetic Philosophy and the Sociology of Comte	51
Why Read Spencer?	52
Notes	52

5 THE SOCIOLOGY OF HERBERT SPENCER 54

Spencer's Moral Philosophy: Social Statics and Principles
of Ethics 54

Spencer's First Principles 56

Spencer's The Study of Sociology 58

The Methodological Problems Confronting Sociology 58

The Theoretical Argument 60

A Note on Spencer's Descriptive Sociology 61

Spencer's Principles of Sociology 64

The Super-Organic and the Organismic Analogy 65

The Analysis of Super-Organic Dynamics 66

The Analysis of Societal Institutions 81

Domestic Institutions and Kinship 82

Ceremonial Institutions 82

Political Institutions 83

Religious Institutions 83

Economic Institutions 84

Critical Conclusions 85

Notes 87

6 SPENCER'S THEORETICAL LEGACY 90

Spencer's Underlying Causal Model 90

Spencer's Theoretical Principles 96

**7 THE ORIGIN AND CONTEXT OF KARL MARX'S
THOUGHT 102**

Biographical Influences on Marx's Thought 102

Hegel and the Young Hegelians 103

Paris and Brussels 104

The London Years 106

G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx 107

Hegel's Idealism 108

Marx's Rejection of Hegel's Idealism 109

Marx's Acceptance of Hegel's Dialectical Method 110

Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx 111

The Young Hegelians and Marx's Thought 111

Feuerbach and Marx's Thought 113

Adam Smith and Karl Marx	114
<i>Political Economy and Marx's Thought</i>	114
<i>Adam Smith's Influence</i>	114
Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx	118
<i>Engels's Critique of Political Economy</i>	118
<i>Engels's Analysis of the Working Class</i>	119
Notes	123

8 THE SOCIOLOGY OF KARL MARX 125

The German Ideology	126
<i>The Nature of Social Theory</i>	126
<i>The Characteristics of All Societies</i>	127
<i>Marx's Theoretical Methodology</i>	130
The Communist Manifesto	132
<i>Bourgeoisie and Proletarians</i>	133
<i>Proletarians and Communists</i>	136
<i>Socialist and Communist Literature</i>	138
<i>Communist and Other Opposition Parties</i>	139
<i>Marx's View of Capitalism in Historical Context</i>	139
<i>Marx's Model of Stratification and Class Conflict</i>	141
Capital	144
<i>The Labor Theory of Value</i>	144
<i>Surplus Value</i>	146
<i>The Demise of Capitalism</i>	148
<i>Capitalism in Historical Context</i>	150
Critical Conclusions	151
<i>How Can Marx Be Refuted?</i>	151
<i>Substantive Contradictions</i>	152
<i>Where Prophecy Fails</i>	153
<i>Is Marx Still Relevant?</i>	155
Notes	156

9 MARX'S THEORETICAL LEGACY 159

Marx's Underlying Causal Model	159
<i>The General Model of History and Evolution</i>	159
<i>The Model of Conflict</i>	163
Marx's Theoretical Principles	166
<i>Principles of Social Organization</i>	166
<i>Principles of Inequality and Change in Social Systems</i>	167
Correcting Marx's Theory	171

10 THE ORIGIN AND CONTEXT OF MAX WEBER'S THOUGHT 173

Biographical Influences on Weber's Thought 173

The Early Years 173

Before the Breakdown 175

The Transition to Sociology 176

Karl Marx and Max Weber 178

The Nature of Science 179

The Inevitability of History 180

Economic Determinism 180

The Methodenstreit and Max Weber 181

Methodological Issues Dividing Historical and Theoretical 182

Weber's Response to the Methodenstreit 183

Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber 185

Dilthey's Methodology of the Social Sciences 185

Weber's Response to Dilthey's Work 186

Heinrich Rickert and Max Weber 186

Rickert on the Objectivity of History 187

Weber's Response to Rickert 188

Weber's Theoretical Synthesis 189

Notes 190

11 THE SOCIOLOGY OF MAX WEBER 192

Weber's Methodology of the Social Sciences 193

The Problem of Values 193

Ideal Types 195

Weber's Image of Social Organization 199

Weber's Analysis of Domination 203

Types of Domination 203

Social Strata: Class and Status 207

Weber's Model of the Class Structure 212

Weber's Model of Social Change 213

Weber's Model of Stratification and Geopolitics 215

Weber on Capitalism and Rationalization 217

Weber's Study of Religion	219
<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i>	220
<i>Weber's Comparative Studies of Religion and Capitalism</i>	226
<i>Weber's Outline of the Social System</i>	228
Critical Conclusions	230
Notes	231

12 MAX WEBER'S THEORETICAL LEGACY 235

Weber's Causal Models of Social Organization	236
<i>Weber's Model on Rationalization</i>	236
<i>Weber's Model of Culture and Rationalization</i>	238
<i>Weber's Model of Markets, Money, Power, and Law</i>	240
<i>Weber's Model on Stratification and Conflict</i>	242
<i>Weber's Model of Geopolitics</i>	244
Weber's Theoretical Principles	246
<i>Principles on the Process of Rationalization</i>	246
<i>Principles on De-Legitimation and Conflict</i>	247
<i>De-Legitimation and Geopolitics</i>	248
Note	249

13 THE ORIGIN AND CONTEXT OF GEORG SIMMEL'S THOUGHT 251

Biographical Influences on Simmel's Thought	251
<i>Simmel's Marginality</i>	251
<i>Simmel's Intellectual Career</i>	252
Intellectual Influences on Simmel's Thought	254
<i>A Note on Simmel and Weber</i>	254
<i>Herbert Spencer, Social Darwinism, and Simmel's Thought</i>	255
<i>Immanuel Kant and Simmel's Thought</i>	256
<i>Karl Marx and Simmel's Thought</i>	259
The Enigmatic Simmel	261
Notes	261

14 THE SOCIOLOGY OF GEORG SIMMEL 263

Simmel's Methodological Approach to the Study of Society 264

What Is Society? 264

How Should Sociology Study Society? 265

What Are the Problem Areas of Sociology? 266

The Web of Group Affiliations 268

The Web of Group Affiliations as a Social Form 269

Structural Changes Accompanying Social Differentiation 269

The Consequences of Differentiation 270

Conflict 272

Conflict as a Social Form 273

Conflict within Groups 274

Conflict Between Groups 276

The Philosophy of Money 278

Exchange as a Social Form 278

Simmel's Assumptions about Human Nature 279

Money in Social Exchange 281

Money and Its Consequences for Social Relations 282

Critical Conclusions 287

Notes 288

15 SIMMEL'S THEORETICAL LEGACY 292

Simmel's Causal Models of Social Organization 293

Simmel's Model of Social Organization 293

Simmel's Model of Differentiation and Group Affiliations 295

Simmel's Model of Money, Markets, and Differentiation 297

*Simmel's Model of Social Differentiation, Conflict,
and Societal Integration* 300

Simmel's Theoretical Principles 302

Simmel's Analysis of the Process of Differentiation 302

Simmel on Conflict 304

**16 THE ORIGIN AND CONTEXT OF ÉMILE DURKHEIM'S
THOUGHT 307**

Biographical Influences on Durkheim's Thought 307

Montesquieu and Durkheim 310

Montesquieu as the First Social Scientist 310

Montesquieu's View of "Laws" 311

Montesquieu's Typology of Governments 312

The Causes and Functions of Governments 313

Rousseau and Durkheim	315
<i>Rousseau's Doctrine</i>	315
<i>Specific Influences on Durkheim</i>	316
Comte and Durkheim	318
<i>The Science of Positivism</i>	319
<i>The Methodological Tenets of Positivism</i>	319
<i>Social Statics and Dynamics</i>	320
<i>Science and Social Progress</i>	320
Tocqueville and Durkheim	321
<i>Tocqueville's Democracy in America</i>	321
<i>Specific Influences on Durkheim</i>	323
Spencer and Durkheim	323
<i>Durkheim and Spencerian Utilitarianism</i>	324
<i>Durkheim and Spencerian Organicism</i>	324
<i>Durkheim and Spencerian Evolutionism</i>	324
Marx and Durkheim	325
Anticipating Durkheimian Sociology	325
<i>Methodological Tenets</i>	326
<i>Theoretical Strategy</i>	326
<i>Substantive Interests</i>	326
<i>Practical Concerns</i>	326
Notes	327

17 THE SOCIOLOGY OF ÉMILE DURKHEIM 330

<i>The Division of Labor in Society</i>	330
<i>Social Solidarity</i>	331
<i>The Collective Conscience</i>	331
<i>Social Morphology</i>	332
<i>Mechanical and Organic Solidarity</i>	332
<i>Social Change</i>	334
<i>Social Functions</i>	337
<i>Pathology and Abnormal Forms</i>	338
<i>The Rules of the Sociological Method</i>	341
<i>What Is a Social Fact?</i>	342
<i>Rules for the Observation of Social Facts</i>	343
<i>Rules for Distinguishing Between the Normal and the Pathological</i>	343
<i>Rules for the Classification of Social Types</i>	344
<i>Rules for the Explanation of Social Facts</i>	344
<i>Rules for Establishing Sociological Proofs</i>	344