Readings *in* Social Theory

Fourth Edition

the CLASSIC TRADITION to POST-MODERNISM

James Farganis

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READINGS IN SOCIAL THEORY

The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism

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About the Author

JAMES FARGANIS was born and raised in New York City, attended its public schools, and received his B.A. from Brooklyn College and his Ph.D. in government from Cornell University. He has taught at several colleges and universities, including Harpur College at SUNY Binghamton, Brooklyn College, Queens College, and The Graduate Faculty of the New School for Social Research. He is currently Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Vassar College, where he taught social theory and political sociology, chaired the Sociology Department and helped establish, and later chaired, the college's first program in multidisciplinary studies, the Program in Science, Technology, and Society. He has been the recipient of an NEH Summer Fellowship, an NEH Program Development Grant, and a Fulbright Senior Scholar Grant to Australia. His published articles on social theory have appeared in *The British Journal of Sociology, Sociological Focus, Journal of Psychiatry and Law,* and *Theory and Society,* and he has reviewed for *Contemporary Sociology, Social Forces, Polity,* and *The American Political Science Review.* He has served on the editorial board of *Polity* and as a corresponding editor to *Theory and Society.* He currently teaches social theory at the New School University.

Preface

The fourth edition of this selection of readings in social theory contains a number of significant changes that reflect the growth and development in the field. These changes are also designed to present the reader with a broader and richer range of selections, adding to the core readings and remaining current with others.

In Part 1, dealing with the Classic Tradition, the Marx chapter now includes "The Fetishism of Commodities," the Durkheim chapter incorporates "Individualism and Intellectuals," and the chapter on Simmel has been expanded to include "The Stranger." Part 2 on Contemporary Theory has likewise been enlarged and now contains a chapter from Zweigenhaft and Domhoff's *Diversity in the Power Elite*, an extended chapter on "Exchange Theory and Rational Choice" that contains selections by George Homans and James S. Coleman, and an expanded "Phenomenology and Ethnomethodology" chapter that incorporates Harold Garfinkel's work on "breach experiments." Michele Barrett's essay, "Words and Things: Materialism and Method in Contemporary Feminist Analysis," provides an important counterpoint to Dorothy Smith in the chapter on "Feminist Theory." In Part 3, a recent essay by Jürgen Habermas brings the student into contact with Habermas's reflections on the possibility of deliberative democracy in a multicultural society and sets him apart from Marcuse's critique of technological rationality and domination.

A website has been developed to accompany the fourth edition. It includes non-text-specific features such as: chapter objectives, web links, Internet exercises, glossary terms, and flashcards. Visit the Social Theory Supersite by going to www.mhhe.com/socialtheory.

I am very appreciative and thankful for the insightful and encouraging reviews submitted for this edition by Richard Garnett, Marshall University; Carol Ray, San Jose State University; Glenna Colclough, University of Alabama, Huntsville, Scott Applerouth, California State University, Northridge; Steve Buechler, Minnesota State University; Terri LeMoyne, University of Tennessee, Chattanooga; Emilia McGulken, Case Western Reserve; and Basil Kardaras, Capital University. The careful reading of the text and the considered suggestions made by these reviewers are reflected in the changes that I have undertaken for this revision; changes, for which, I of course, assume full responsibility as editor.

Working closely with the supportive staff at McGraw-Hill has made it possible to bring the process of revision and rewriting to successful conclusion with ease. Phil Butcher (Publisher), Sherith Pankratz (Sociology Editor), Jill Gordon

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(Assistant Editor), Amy Shaffer (Editorial Coordinator), and Jill Moline (Project Manager) all deserve my special thanks for their conscientious and thoughtful oversight of this project. Finally, I want to thank George Ritzer for endorsing the original idea for this reader, for his continuing support of the project as a consulting editor, and for his sustained friendship.

James Farganis
Poughkeepsie, New York
New York City, New York
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Introduction

The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism: An Overview

James Farganis

I The Classic Tradition

Although theories about society date back to the Greeks, sociology as a disciplined, scientific inquiry is of more recent origin. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) coined the term "sociology" in 1822 to connote the systematic study of society. The influences upon him date back to Charles de Montesquieu (1689–1755) and to the reflections of the *philosophes* during the Enlightenment. Of equal importance to Comte were those conservative thinkers who surfaced after the French Revolution to condemn the Enlightenment and its doctrines. Francois Marie Arouet de Voltaire (1694–1778), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), Denis Diderot (1713–1784), and Jean Antoine de Condorcet (1742–1794) were the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers whose optimistic views about individual rights, human perfectibility, and social progress were absorbed into sociological theory, as were the conservative views of Louis de Bonald (1754–1840) and Joseph de Maistre (1754–1821) regarding the primacy of the social, the role of custom and tradition in social life, and the centrality of the family, the community, groups, and institutions in ordering, regulating, and shaping the lives of individuals. In the next few pages we will review briefly the key ideas of the Enlightenment *philosophes* and their conservative critics.

Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, published in 1721 when he was thirty-two years old, illustrate the idea of sociological perspective. Montesquieu wrote these letters as if they were an exchange between Persian visitors to France. He published them anonymously, claiming that the Persians who wrote them had stayed with him during their visit. In the letters Montesquieu comments, often satirically, on the customs and habits of French society of his time. The ability to step outside of one's society, to distance oneself from what seems to be natural, and to develop a different perspective from the one taken for granted, are sociological attitudes exhibited in this early work.

The Spirit of the Laws, Montesquieu's most famous work, appeared in 1748. In it he develops systematically his views on how the culture of a people is affected by their geography and climate and temperament. Laws, customs, and forms of government are not natural phenomena, but are shaped by the surrounding conditions under which a particular people have to live. Montesquieu's method combines observation with reflection, and his conclusions reflect a careful study of the relationship between the behavior and beliefs of people and their environmental context. In addition, Montesquieu explored population densities and property distribution in order to arrive at his social and political typologies.

Enlightenment *philosophes* like Montesquieu were the eighteenth-century precursors of the classical sociological theorists. The *philosophes* were impressed with the revolutionary advances wrought in the natural sciences, particularly by Newtonian physics, and sought to discover the scientific truths about society:

> What is new and original about Enlightenment thought, therefore, is the wholehearted adoption of the methodological pattern of Newton's physics; and what is even more important for our consideration of the philosophical foundations of sociological theory is the fact that immediately with its adoption it was generalized and employed in realms other than the mathematical and physical. (Zeitlin 1968, 7).

Social order, the inequalities of class, the domination by an aristocracy were no longer to be accepted as divinely ordained and unchangeable truths. Science was to be a critical instrument in the pursuit of truth, a truth that would liberate people from the dark myths of the divine right of kings and religious dogma and lead them toward a progressively democratic order based on the newly discovered truths about the "rights of man." Rousseau wrote of the inequalities between people caused by social institutions and practices, and noted that in the "natural" state the differences between people were far less acute than in society. It is society, he argued, that distorts the basic goodness, decency, and equality that are the natural condition of mankind:

> I conceive that there are two kinds of inequality among the human species; one, which I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and consists in difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of mind or of the soul: and another, which may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorized, by the consent of men. This latter consists of the different privileges which some men enjoy to the prejudice of others; such as that of being more rich, more honored, more powerful, or even in a position to extract obedience. (Rousseau 1947, 160).

Condorcet, a mathematician who endorsed the idea that the social sciences would progress faster if they followed the methods of the natural sciences, firmly believed in the notion of human perfectibility and progress in the achievement of a just society. Condorcet supported equal rights for women, strongly opposed slavery, called for universal suffrage, and endorsed the separation of church and state, freedom of opinion, and a wide range of social welfare measures to help the less fortunate members of society.

The ideas of the *philosophes* took hold in the climate of prerevolutionary France, and the French Revolution is arguably the political culmination of those ideas in action. The Revolution challenged the legitimacy of the aristocratic state and those religious, social, and political institutions that supported it.

In place of the *ancien régime,* a new social order was legislated into being based on rational principles, consciously constructed by politicized and informed individuals. Laws were passed which transformed the political, economic, social, and cultural life of France. The aristocracy was abolished, the church was abolished, the industrial guilds were abolished. Divorce became legalized, the educational system was reformed and centralized, and a new governing structure was created. What informed these revolutionary changes were the ideas developed by the *philosophes* concerning the rights of individuals to establish collectively their own government and to remake their social institutions according to their notions of progress and justice.

Out of the revolutionary upheaval in France there emerged a long period of instability, of counterrevolution, of attempts at monarchical restoration, and Napoleonic imperial domination. Rather than the steady progress toward a free and democratic society in which human reason would order the affairs of politics and society, there followed a period of bloodshed, division, domination, and reaction. The Enlightenment *philosophes* were seen by their critics as naive mythmakers who had substituted their own *a priori* ideals of progress, reason, and freedom for the earlier mythologies. Far from undertaking a scientific examination of society and the human condition, the *philosophes* had actually

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engaged in a form of moral philosophising. Carl Becker (1959, 101) asks the question:

> Is it, then, possible that the Philosophers were not really interested in establishing the rights suitable to man's nature on the facts of experience? Is it possible that they were engaged in that nefarious medieval enterprise of reconciling the facts of human experience with the truths already, in some fashion, revealed to them?

To these questions Becker answers with an emphatic "yes" as he likens the science of the *philosophes* to a religious faith in progress, reason, and human goodness.

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, a group of social theorists led by Louis de Bonald and Joseph de Maistre emerged as a conservative, counter-Enlightenment, intellectual force. They were distressed at the condition of France following the Revolution, its social dislocation, political turmoil, and general disintegration, and they held the *philosophes* directly accountable. Not only had the *philosophes* and their followers badly misjudged the social needs of people to belong to groups and communities greater than themselves, to abide by collective ideals, and to partake in collective rituals, but they had falsely assumed that humans are rational and progressive creatures, and that they are constituted as individuals by their natural rights rather than shaped by their social environment.

The primacy of the social over the individual is a fundamental point of difference between the Enlightenment *philosophes* and their conservative critics. Whereas the *philosophes* saw the individual as endowed with natural and inalienable rights and society as a contract entered into by individuals, the counter-Enlightenment conservatives viewed society as primary and the individual as shaped by social institutions to meet the needs of the larger social order. The ideology of individualism was a distortion of the truly social nature of human life. Family, community, church, town, and guild are functionally interrelated and provide for the material and spiritual needs of ordinary people. Tradition, custom, and institutions that have stood the test of time should inform us about the social nature of humankind, they claimed. The Church was to be seen as a necessary binding and integrative force, and the family, not the individual, was viewed as the basic unit of society.

The past and the present form a seamless web, and it is only the arrogance of individualism, or more particularly the presumption of the power of human reason, that has allowed some people to believe that they can legislate a new social order. The result of this arrogance, the conservatives seemed to be saying, was the social chaos and instability that confronted France following the Revolution, and by extension, would be the fate of all social change inspired by abstract deductive reason.

The classic tradition begins with Karl Marx (1818–1883) and ends with Karl Mannheim's (1893–1947) writings on the sociology of knowledge. The classical social theorists wished to distinguish their work from speculative moral philosophy and to contribute to a scientific study of society. This is the objective that unites them, but their success in achieving it is debatable. Despite their best intentions the social theorists of the classic tradition were, for the most part, unable to leave behind the moral presuppositions that impelled their inquiries. Their greatness for us lies as much in their cogent analyses of the forces of modernization and its impact on the human condition as in their noble efforts at a science of society.

The classical texts do not speak with one voice about any matter, and so it is difficult to ascribe common characteristics to them. Even on the critical question of their commitment to science as against philosophy, it should be noted that these theorists held differing views of what they meant by science. They were divided over the question of whether the methods of science as they had been developed in the physical sciences were appropriate to the subject matter of the social sciences. Some saw the quest for social

laws as no different from the discovery of the laws of nature, whereas others found compelling the claim that human beings are unique in their rational and linguistic abilities. Distinctions were made between the natural and the cultural, or social, sciences, and arguments were advanced that each requires a different methodology.

Although the classical theorists agree that claims must be substantiated by appeal to evidence, there is little unity on what constitutes evidence. If history is the dense and rich source of sociological evidence, some approached history as if it were governed by laws of social development that must be uncovered, while others viewed history as contingent and unknowable in its totality. To some, history connotes progressive evolution toward emancipation, or social justice, or democracy; to others, history is nothing but a factual chaos until order is imposed on it temporarily by the researcher and his or her theory.

Nor was there any unity with respect to what constitutes society. On the one hand, some maintained that society can be studied as a totality, whereas others saw individuals as the component parts of society and the source of all observable action. If the latter were the case, then some feared that sociology would be reduced to psychology and could make no contribution of its own. On the other hand, if society could be studied as an entity unto itself, there was the danger of inventing a metaphysical group mind and thereby defeating the purpose of scientific investigation.

The classic tradition is not a single tradition speaking with a uniform voice. It is mired in conflicting views and often irreconcilable perspectives that reflect deeply held moral assumptions. Science is powerless to resolve these moral differences, and as a result many of these divergences continue to surface in contemporary social theory. Today the controversy takes the form of an intense dispute between adherents who claim that sociological truths can be established by a strict observance of the rules of positivism and those who think that sociology is a discursive discipline whose truths can be established through rational, generalized, speculative, and persuasive argument (Alexander 1987).

In what follows we will discuss the intellectual conflicts and tensions within the classic tradition. These differences stem from the varied attitudes of the classical theorists to the legacy of the Enlightenment. Did they believe in progress? Did they view science as an unalloyed blessing? Would human reason lead to a more just and humane society, or would new forms of domination emerge in the age of science? The different responses to these questions stake out the relationship of these theorists to the Enlightenment traditions. They also demonstrate how their unarticulated moral presuppositions led the classical theorists to define their science, their methods, and their sociology in radically diverse ways.

The principal contributors to the classic tradition are both scientists and discursive theorists, and their work is both a continuation of the Enlightenment tradition and a departure from it. The classical theorists were more attentive systematically than their Enlightenment predecessors to empirical evidence and to historical analysis. Their avoidance of unfounded and broadly speculative generalizations marks them as social theorists who relied on evidence and rational argument.

It has been suggested (Salomon 1945, 596) that much of the development of sociological theory can be understood as a debate with the ghost of Karl Marx. On this view Marx emerges as the child of the Enlightenment, and the conflicts and contradictions within the classic tradition are explained by reference to Marx and his adversaries. However, the development of sociological theory may also be said to owe much to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), especially in light of his influence on Max Weber and Georg Simmel and the growing recognition of his significance for post-modernist social thought (Chapter 14).

The Marxist tradition represents a continuation of many of the Enlightenment's rationalist and progressive convictions. This humanistic project of a just and democratic rational social order has been carried forward in the works of Jürgen Habermas (Chapter 13). By contrast, Nietzsche's critique of scientific objectivity, his view of reason as a form of domination, his disdain for democratic culture and politics, and his romantic vision of the heroic triumph of the *Übermensch* over the "last men" who seek happiness find resonance in the works of Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and the post-modernists.

It is against this backdrop of continuities and discontinuities with the Enlightenment and the internal tensions that mark the classic tradition that some of the key social theorists will be discussed. Our aim is to present the different perspectives, the different ideas concerning the relationship of the individual to society, and the different methodologies that constitute the classic tradition, and to dispel the notion that it is a singular tradition that represents a unified perspective.

The classic tradition represents those works that have come to be considered the foundational texts of the discipline of sociology. They are generally regarded to be excellent examples of the kind of work that people who claim to be sociologists ought to engage in, and, because they are exemplary, they continue to serve as a source of ideas and hypotheses about, and orientations to, social reality.

For the most part, these works tend to address a broad range of problems emerging from the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society. While reading from the works of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, the student should constantly question the relevance and importance of what is being said. For example, how significant for our time are Marx's ideas of class and class conflict? Does it matter at all that America and other Western industrial societies are moving into a post-industrial age, into a service economy in which industrial labor is on the decline and in which the service sector is expanding? Does the emergence of the information age with its emphasis on knowledge create new class relationships, or is this an age in which class categories are no longer relevant? What are the sources of conflict in our contemporary society and are they traceable to economic discrepancies between rich and poor, or do the lines of conflict fall among different status groups, that is, racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual? Similar questions can and should be formulated about other readings in this anthology.

Even when these classical texts seem to be dated, they nevertheless provide us with the important questions that must be upppermost in the mind of a sociologist. Do they alert us to observe those around us, to listen closely to their expressions of belief and to ponder where these views come from? Are the values that people hold a reflection of their class background, or is it their status groups that most closely influence their beliefs? How people speak, what clothes they wear, what habits they exhibit should lead us to inquire as to the social antecedents of these behaviors and to ask what kind of image is being projected and for what purpose.

More broadly, the classical texts compel us to ask what we mean by the term "society." We all take it for granted that we know what society is, yet a moment's reflection will cause the reader to pause and think. Is society nothing more than a collection of individuals? How are these different individuals brought together so that they can cooperate and understand one another? Does society have an existence outside of us, or is society in us, in our consciousness, and, if so, how did it get there? If, as some would maintain, society is a collective system of commonly shared beliefs and agreed-on rules of behavior, who makes up the beliefs and the rules and are they in the interest of all or the dominant few? Marx and Durkheim wrestle with these questions and come up with very different answers. But despite their differences, they are concerned with fundamental questions

that define the sociological enterprise, and the student is invited to think through these questions with the skilled guidance of some of the great minds in social theory.

Auguste Comte (1798–1857), often cited as the first to use the word sociology to refer to the new discipline, sought to use historical evidence to establish laws of social development. He was less rigorous and systematic in his research than those who followed him, and for this reason he may be viewed as a proto-sociologist. The contradictory influences which shaped his work are evident in his commitment to science and progress on the one hand and his view that individualism was "the disease of the Western world" on the other. It will be recalled that the Enlightenment thinkers endorsed the view that scientific progress and individual rights were part of an emerging democratic social order. It was the counter-Enlightenment that condemned the idea of individualism and offered the notion that society and its institutions are primary and shape the behavior of individuals. Comte taps into the Enlightenment for his views on science and progress and draws on the counter-Enlightenment for his views on the relationship of the individual to society.

Comte's theory of society was based on his conviction that the scientific approach, or positivism, was the most appropriate method for understanding social order and social change. By positivism Comte meant a study of society based on sensory observation, historical comparison, and experimentation in the quest for universal laws, rather than reliance on abstract moral principles about human nature and social justice. Comte represents a viewpoint that disdains the untidiness of democratic politics and leads to an endorsement of rule by a knowledge elite. Unlike Plato's philosopher-kings, however, the rulers of modern society would be sociologist-kings, people with technical knowledge of the operations of society and their consequences. Today we refer to this kind of thinking as technocratic, and hence for us Comte is the first technocrat.

Karl Marx (1818–1883), Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), and Max Weber (1864–1920) are generally considered the "holy trinity" of the classic tradition. Although there are important conceptual similarities between them, there are considerable methodological and substantive differences, some of which have already been alluded to; yet the significant points of contrast for what follows will be in their often irreconcilable moral assumptions, which provide them with critical perspectives on modernity, and in the different ways in which they carry on the sociological enterprise.

Marx and Comte were only superficially similar in their approach. Both are interested in a science of society, both view history as the source of empirical data, and both tend to think in terms of stages of historical development and the predictive value of their social theories. But Marx is a dialectical thinker in contrast to Comte's positivism, so that Marx sees social development as a consequence of conflicting classes acting to shape a future society. Dialectical reasoning attempts to capture the dynamic character of social reality by viewing change as a consequence of historically evolving oppositional forces. In this case it refers to the capacity of one class to negate, to challenge, and to overthrow the domination of another and bring about revolutionary change.

In place of Comtean technocrats, whose prevision allows them privileged access to the future course of social development, Marx evokes an active and politically conscious proletariat whose collective oppression compels them to act in behalf of their own liberation and thus profoundly alter the social, economic, and political circumstances of their existence.

At the heart of Marx's theory of industrial society is the moral view of human beings as essentially free and of capitalism as a mode of production that enslaves people through institutional arrangements which define the relationship between wage labor and capital. Marx observed the development of capitalism and

saw in it a system that legitimated the exploitation of one class by another. He sought to expose the true nature of that relationship by challenging the accepted notions of private property and individual freedom. Marx projected a revolutionary destruction of capitalism as a necessary stage in the emancipatory development of mankind.

No less sincere and profoundly troubled by the advent of modern industrial society, Durkheim analyzed the central problem of modernity as the breakdown of those shared moral beliefs that develop as a result of a common commitment to common ideals and values by the members of a community. For Durkheim the condition of modernity is characterized by the breakdown of communal ties and bonds as individuals are compelled to live in a social environment that is characterized as *anomic,* i.e, normless and lawless. The similarities to the views of the conservative counter-Enlightenment should be noted, although Durkheim did not seek to return to the old order. The term *anomie* literally means without law, and it is Durkheim's view that this pervasive condition of modernity quite literally destroys individuals who must exist within it, for such conditions are responsible for increases in the suicide rate. Whereas Marx sees the rules and regulations of capitalist society as so many manifestations of class interest and domination, and argues for their destruction in order to liberate the proletariat from domination, Durkheim argues that legitimate rules and regulations are a necessary and essential feature of social life. People need ideals to believe in, and they need rules to guide their social life. Moral regulation and social integration are positive features of a healthy society in which individuals may thrive as members of a community.

Durkheim wrestled with the destructive features of anomie and the growth of individualism in modern society. The "cult of the individual" was Durkheim's attempt to reconcile the central tendency of modernity toward individualism with the view that moral consensus is threatened by fragmentation, extreme differentiation, and individualization. In "Individualism and the Intellectuals" (Durkheim 1973), he distinguished between egoistic individualism and a moral individualism, arguing that the latter was the "cult of the individual" and had become the basis of the new consensus of modernity. According to this view, the individual is a subject with rights and with the moral responsibility to act in accordance with principles of justice and the common good. Moral individualism is a social creation supported and encouraged by social institutions and moral practices. Durkheim argued that the idea of the egoistic individual intent on self-interest is a metaphysical construct that depicts a natural and atomistic creation whose primacy is justified philosophically, not sociologically.

Much of the disagreement between Marx and Durkheim turns on the moral assumptions they make regarding the relationship of the individual to society. Marx's emancipatory view precedes his empirical analyses and provides the foundation for his theory. Marx questions the legitimacy of any community, ideals, or institutions that tolerate, support, or justify inequality, i.e., the domination of one class over another. It is Marx's claim that with the destruction of private property the equality of all can be secured under communism as all the members become equal participants in the social, political, and economic life of the community.

By contrast, Durkheim rejects this egalitarian conception as utopian and impossible to realize. As a result, he argues that certain inequalities are natural and cannot be eradicated. It is possible to reform institutions so as to make them conform more faithfully to the established egalitarian ideals of society. Thus Durkheim would favor policies that foster equality of opportunity because they allow the natural talents and abilities of individuals to be judged irrespective of race, gender, and ethnicity. If the institutions of society keep faith with that principle of justice, then individuals will

identify with the community, sharing its ideals and its moral consensus, and will judge its outcomes as just and legitimate. If, by contrast, economic institutions favor the privileged and risk the formation of classes and class conflict, then the binding ideals of the community will be shattered. Alternatively, if economic policies favor the least privileged by attempting to equalize outcomes, society runs the risk of losing support from the vast majority of its members who believe that rewards are due to those who demonstrate ability. Consequently, Durkheim recommends social and economic reforms that will equalize conditions and make the social ideals of equality of opportunity credible because these reforms would foster integration and the acceptance of regulative norms as legitimate.

For Durkheim, in sharp contrast to Marx, it is possible to have community with inequality, provided the inequality is a consequence of merit and achievement. Marx's theory seeks to liberate people from the very system that Durkheim wishes to reform and legitimate. Although both theorists are analyzing and interpreting industrial capitalism, they do so from the different perspectives that are formed from the moral presuppositions they hold about the individual and society.

Durkheim's views on sociological method are clearly patterned after the natural sciences, and some of his work reflects a commitment to statistical analysis and systematic data gathering that make it exemplary for scientific sociology. Durkheim is meticulous in the way he constructs his argument, impeccable in his use of logical analysis, and precise in the way he marshals evidence leading to his generalizations. Durkheim's study, *Suicide*, is taken as a model of how a sociological analysis should be conducted, and his *Rules of Sociological Method* is widely recognized as a major contribution to the methodology of the social sciences.

Max Weber's theory of action focuses attention on the individual as a social actor, and his *verstehende* methodology invites us to explore the subjective meaning of action from the actor's point of view. In this respect, Weber's work seems to be in conflict with the more systematic and positivistic inclinations of Durkheim's methodology and the dialectical approach taken by Karl Marx.

Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* argues that religious beliefs may have profound and even revolutionary economic consequences; for ideas are not simply epiphenomenal consequences of economic modes of production. In this study Weber reveals how belief in the tenets of Calvinism led to changes in the believers' attitudes toward work that became an important factor in the emergence of capitalism. In opposition to Marx's rational view of history as an ordered development leading to a logically determined endpoint, or *telos,* Weber views history as contingent and accidental, and human action as often entailing unforeseen and unanticipated results. Weber seems to be saying, however tentatively, that capitalism was the unanticipated consequence of Protestant beliefs and not the programmatic and rational transition from feudalism as depicted by Marx.

"Class, Status, Party" focuses on Weber's views on power in modern society in contrast to Marx's notion of the ruling class. Weber seems to share Marx's definition of class but denies the singular importance that Marx ascribes to it. Rather than viewing classes and class consciousness as a necessary development under capitalism, Weber sees status groups as natural communities that impact more directly and immediately on the consciousness and actions of individuals. Furthermore, the Marxist view that there is a single avenue to power in society and that the dominant economic class is the ruling class is challenged by Weber's analysis. Economic class position, status honor, and persuasive leadership of a party are distinctive means to power. They may overlap, but they are not identical and are not always found together in the same individual.

Excerpts from Weber's essay on methodology provide an excellent discussion of problems

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