

Review essay

Shaky foundations

The presuppositions and internal contradictions of James Coleman's Foundations of Social Theory

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James Coleman has written a very serious book, which deserves an equally serious reply. Certainly the dignity, scope, and power of his effort demonstrates that, contrary to the postmodernistic claims of philosopher Richard Rorty, this genre of social theory is not dead. "Foundationalism" is alive and well. Coleman lays out analytical foundations that could, indeed, reorient "positive" social theory, and he connects them with normative commitments and empirical findings that, if true, call for rethinking not only the basic direction of modern society but the role of social knowledge within in. The book will have a wide audience, as have some other recent "foundational" works of social theory, with which the book engages in explicit and subrosa conversation.

The problem is not with the genre, but with the employment, not with the form, but the content. Coleman's analytic commitments are unusually narrow ones, revealing a reified, one-dimensional conception of human beings and their world. His normative commitments, admirable in themselves, are laced with a nostalgic and sentimental vision of societies gone by. Empirical findings figure hardly at all in this work that confidently announces itself as "mirroring" nature. When they do, as often as not they are partial and simplified readings of complex empirical events and trends, this from a man whose earlier manipulations of data have been dexterous and legion.

I

One could try to support these criticisms in terms of the history of social thought, the interpretation of which Coleman eschews but in which, nevertheless, his work is thoroughly embedded. *Foundations* is an effort to revive contract theory. In the tradition of rational choice and exchange, it is the first major empirical social theory that seeks to go beyond the merely mechanical analysis of transactions to engage the great liberal treatises on the origins of human societies that dominated social thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Of course, between these earlier times and our own there stands the monumental contractarian theory of John Rawls (*A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). From two assumptions Rawls derived a magnificent theory of justice. He reasoned that if actors rationally calculate their self-interest behind the “veil of ignorance,” they will end up allocating rights and responsibilities in a highly egalitarian and democratic way. Yet for these decisions to be fully articulated and consistent, Rawls asserted, actors would have to adhere to the “difference principle” as well, to the commitment that inequality can be justified only insofar as it benefits the condition of the least well off.

The problem with Rawls’s justice philosophy is that it is not sociological. Philosopher kings may, and welfare theorists might, but everyday actors cannot make decisions behind a veil of ignorance about their own positions in the social world, nor do they altruistically adhere to the principle of difference. As a sociologist, Coleman recognizes these limitations in Rawls’s work. As a fellow contractarian, however, his responses to this recognition are extremely restricted. Coleman narrows but ultimately continues to maintain Rawls’s assumptions of clear-headed rationality and unlimited information. On the other hand, Rawls’s second postulate is abandoned entirely, and with it any possibility for a social system to sustain significant levels of unselfish and altruistic behavior. The result is that Coleman’s normative theory cannot fulfill its noble ambitions. It can neither present an inspiring vision of society nor convincingly describe how such a society might come into being. We are left instead with a thoroughly degraded world, in which human actions are selfish and hedonistic and in which control over them resides in a sovereign, or sovereigns, over which no person has control.

This is certainly not what Coleman has intended. He has wished to produce a theory of empowerment that reinserts individual will and power into the center of our thinking about social systems. To understand why he has failed in spite of himself, we must see how Coleman is trapped inside of his own “theoretical logic.” He has made certain assumptions about action and about order that ultimately make the freedom of individuals and the responsiveness of corporate groups – much less democracy, solidarity, and reciprocal support – impossible to maintain.

II

To understand why theoretical logic works in this way, one would have to consult, as Coleman clearly has not, two signal books of our intellectual past. At the beginning of this century, Eli Halévy, the great French intellectual historian, wrote *The Growth of Philosophical Radicalism* (Clifton, New Jersey: Augustus M. Kelley, 1972 [1901–04]). In it he explained why any sociologically sensitive version of contract theory must eventually lead to the overly controlling kind of system that Coleman describes. In its liberal and individualistic version, Halévy wrote, rationalistic liberalism assumed the natural identity of interests that, as Smith’s invisible hand, became the equilibrium assumption of classical economics. Only in the nineteenth century did contract theory finally face up to the existence of structured inequality. Bentham was a philosophical radical because he saw that only if such hierarchy were significantly modified would equilibrium be achieved. A natural identity of interests is not possible, but if state action were to be rigorously employed, an “artificial identity” of interests would be.

The problem, as Halévy (and later Foucault) pointed out, is that, within the confines of utilitarian rationalism, this laudable theoretical move has unintended consequences: it produces the panopticon, a coercive and antiliberal structure of control. Rawls could avoid this conclusion only by positing the fictions of veil and difference, which allowed him to return to “natural identity” in a concealed way. Because Coleman disposes of these assumptions, without abandoning contract theory, he is doomed to repeat the Benthamite fallacy that Halévy exposed.

The second book that Coleman might have consulted is *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: Free Press, 1973), which Talcott Parsons published in 1937. Following up on Halévy, Parsons suggested that the way out of the utilitarian dilemma was to break out of contract theory

entirely. Do not simply abandon the individualistic assumption of natural identity, but the rationalistic conception of action as well. Rather than concealing natural identity presumptions by philosophical fiat, the processes that construct cultural identity must be studied empirically. Only if non-utilitarian, symbolic action is recognized can the possibility for moral agreement and voluntary action be brought back into normative thinking about society.

III

Let me begin here, as I have elsewhere, with the fact that every theory of society must make certain assumptions about action and order. From this perspective, Coleman's first problem is that he adopts a restrictive, unrealistically instrumental view of action. By invoking the term "purposive," Coleman obscures the true narrowness of the action he describes. At one point, for example, Coleman suggests that action "could hardly be described as *other* than purposive" (p. 11, italics added). At another, he calls purposiveness simply "the model of action we apply when we say we understand the action of another person," adding "we say that we understand the 'reasons' why the person acted in a certain way, implying that we understand the intended goal" (p. 13). In such rationales we find echoes of the Weberian vocabulary: purposive action is deliberate action, action that is neither completely unreflexive, such as a habit, nor merely spontaneous affectual response. We also, ironically, hear strains of Parsons's construction, for Coleman even suggests that the purposefulness of action, its goal-orientation, does not preclude the possibility that "values or preferences" shape the very framework within which goals can be pursued.¹

It is crucial, however, to understand that such a broad and ecumenical definition of purposive is not, in fact, how Coleman actually employs the term. He means for purposive to be equated with rationality only in the economic sense of maximizing utility. "For the theory of this book," he writes, "the elementary actors ... constitute extraordinarily simplified abstractions of human individuals. They are hedonic creatures..." (p. 503).

Coleman is not, however, an unsophisticated man. In contrast to the blinkered argument one finds in Homans or Blau, he is neither abusive nor blissfully unaware vis-à-vis the objections that can be made to the brand of fundamentalism he employs. His responses to these objec-

tions, however, rarely confront the nature of action in an empirical way; when he does so, indeed, he broaches suggestions that undermine the argument he has abstractly maintained. Coleman's typical responses are programmatic in character. To assume anything other than hedonistic calculation, he argues, would contradict the tenets of methodological individualism, which demands the autonomy and self-sustaining independence of the individual actor. It would also, he believes, contradict the ambitions of social theory itself, the goal of which can be nothing other than producing increasing information for the lay, but scientifically-inclined, rational actor (p. 17; cf., chapters 23–24.)²

Finally, Coleman claims that to acknowledge something less than perfect rationality amounts to a failure to take the actor's own point of view. Either this argument is disingenuous or it is based on a real failure to understand one of the most important intellectual movements in our time. For those who have actually investigated the actor's point of view, from Husserl and Wittgenstein to Schutz and Garfinkel, have demonstrated that it is hardly one in which utility is the principal concern. Rationality may be the language of the phenomenological world of common sense, but this is an index less of objective efficiency than of unthinking trust in the meaningfulness of the social world. As I have said, Coleman shies away from such empirical studies of action, preferring to formulate a theory of postulated, not real, human activity: "The theory is constructed for a set of abstract rational actors" (p. 18).

Coleman has given up the hermeneutic effort to interpret action from within, the method that gives to the founding classics of sociology so much of their compelling force. Such efforts to investigate not only the complex strategies that actors employ but the complexes of meanings and feelings to which they refer are entirely missing from his work. Instead, Coleman has adopted, whole-hog, the efficiency maxims of another discipline. Rather than hermeneutics and actor-sensitive interpretation, we have what might be called post hoc hypothetical reconstruction. How odd then, to conclude, as Coleman does, that whether his action theory can "mirror the functioning of actual social systems which involve real persons" (p. 18) must be treated as "an empirical question"!

IV

Such an abstract and hypothetical rational action model, of course, is nothing particularly new, even in the field of sociology. Homans devel-

oped it clearly and more elegantly, if less economistically, in his earlier theory of exchange. What is unique to Coleman's position is not his commitment to rational action but the way in which he combines it with his approach to order.

Ever since his articles on constitutions in the 1960s, it has been clear that the contribution Coleman intends to make is to articulate rational action with a collectivist rather than individualistic understanding of order. Indeed, Coleman argues that the fundamental failure of earlier efforts at theorizing within the utility-maximizing tradition lies precisely here: they have been unable to move successfully from the micro level of interacting rational individuals to the macro level of collectivities that organize and interact with them.

It is important to recognize that Coleman himself presents his contribution in a more generalized and ambitious way. He sees it as an effort to theorize the micro-to-macro link *per se*, not as merely an effort to do so within the particular rationalist tradition. He can make such a representation only by ignoring the possibility that individuals can also be conceived as participating in the construction of collective order if they act in a nonrational – meaning-oriented or expressive – way. Two strategies of denial are employed.³ On the one hand, when he refers to expressive behavior, Coleman persistently presents it as merely spontaneous and psychological, as a form of motive that cannot be articulated with collective structures. On the other hand, when he refers to morality, Coleman identifies it with collective norms that are severed from any articulation with individual action. Revealingly, Coleman never writes of moral action as such.

Strong arguments can be made against these rationales for ignoring alternative versions of the micro-macro link. Dramaturgical theorists from Burke to Geertz and Goffman have demonstrated that expressivity can, indeed must, articulate with collectively organized patterns of symbolic codes. Symbolic interactionists, ethnomethodologists, and conversation analysts have demonstrated that collective morality is articulated and situationally specified in the course of practical action. Yet, even if Coleman's arguments are specious, in the framework of his own argument they have rhetorical force. If expressivity is non-social and morality anti-(rather than supra-) individual, the rationalistic perspective wins by default: it is, indeed, the only approach that can move to collective order and retain a reference to acting individuals.

What Coleman must do, then, is to explain collective order without altering the picture of discrete, separated, and independent individuals, for his instrumentally-rational theory assumes that neither values nor solidarity bridges the space in between. I will argue that the exigencies of theoretical logic make this an ultimately impossible task. To eliminate nonrational, psychological, or meaningful action is to preclude the possibility of an inner bond between actors and their environments, a bond that allows them to create and affect objects outside of themselves. If actors are conceived of as rational and separated, collective order can ultimately be understood only as an outside, anti-voluntaristic force. Unless the *deus ex machina* of “natural identity of interests” is posited, this collective source of order must be seen as looming larger than actors, as affecting them in a coercive way.

The drama of Coleman’s book is how he comes to terms with this ineluctable theoretical fact, since it is certainly not something he either intends or desires. The path to this conclusion is not straightforward; it involves a sustained false start and a series of heroic and extremely interesting, if self-contradictory, efforts, to maintain voluntarism before arriving at a determinism whose theoretical origins are thoroughly denied.⁴

V

Coleman’s principal ambition, as I have suggested, is to develop a theory that can maintain individual autonomy while conceptualizing collective structure, and in the introduction he presents his rationalistic approach in proudly and aggressively individualistic terms. He describes the approach more technically in an early chapter as one of “structured independence,” which posits a situation “in which each actor assumes the others’ actions are independent of his own” (p. 29).

If people are so independent, one might ask, from whence does the “structure” come? While rationalism maintains these discrete individuals, Coleman wants to do so only if they can be collectively organized. Recognizing the existence of a social system, he asks “what makes it [something] other than these individuals independently exercising control over their [own] activities?” (p. 31) Since shared morality or psychological identification do not exist, the answer to this question is a simple one. Individuals, Coleman suggests, are not fully in control of the activities that are necessary to satisfy their rational interests. To the

contrary, actors find that these activities are partially or wholly under the control of others. In order to satisfy his or her individual interest, therefore, an actor must engage in "transactions" (p. 32). Not all transactions tie individuals to social structure. Because private acts with divisible resources have no externalities, they do not bind the actor to others. Nor do exchanges between two individuals. Transactions that do tie individuals to social structure are "transfers," in which actors give up their rights to control some part of their resources, or selves, to another actor or collectivity. They do so in order better to satisfy their interests, given the world of scarce resources. It is this conscious transfer by individuals of powers, rights, and resources that constitutes Coleman's micro-to-macro link. Collective order demands the diminution of individual control. Coleman is well aware that he can continue to conceptualize independence only if this control is given up for rational, conscious, and calculated reasons that redound to the interests of the individual.

This solution, of course, is nothing less, or more, than the old fashioned social contract, its Lockean form thinly disguised by the language of modern neo-classical times. Even within the economic tradition, however, one strong objection to such reasoning has been raised. It concerns the assumption of an extraordinary convergence of short-term individual calculations and long-term collective interests. But, is not the longer-term rationality of an individual actor limited? How can somebody know whether he or she will do better for themselves by entering a collective group? If nothing else, after all, there is the asymmetry of time. If between the handing over of private resources and the expected benefit there is a gap of indeterminate duration, how can a rational actor be certain that any particular transfer will yield sufficient result? This is where trust comes in, a concept traditionally understood as revealing habit, cathexis, or leap of faith. Coleman devotes an ingenious chapter to the task of demonstrating, to the contrary, that trust is itself a result of rational calculation. As he puts it: "The elements confronting the potential trustor are nothing more or less than the considerations a rational actor applies in deciding whether to place a bet" (p. 99; cf. 178). If this is ingenious, in the end it is also absurd. If trust is the antidote to limited rationality, can it remain "trust" if it is itself reduced to the results of rational choice?

While transfer transactions do introduce collective order in the form of "situational constraints" (p. 32), Coleman wants to insist that individuals still retain a good deal of control. In fact, Coleman builds from the

notion of collective-order-as-transfer to a sociological critique of authority and authoritarian sociology. The superordinates in collective organizations, he insists, do not simply have power over those lower than themselves. The reason is that, for an organization to exist, subordinates must first have “vested” power in the organization: “It is the subordinate’s transfer of control over his actions to another that allows an authority system to function” (p. 89). Collective organizations must be seen as vehicles for the empowerment of their employees. How otherwise, according to contract theory, could there be an explanation for why they came into existence? Against Weber, Coleman (p. 170) stresses that organizations are less hierarchies of downward control than networks of coordinated transactions among actors who remain relatively independent.

To anyone who does not share his abstract and hedonic understanding of action, the explanations that follow from this approach to organization are mechanistic and implausible, even if they remain ingenious and, in their own terms, coherent. Coleman writes, for example, that charismatic authority is vested for the simple reason that actors more or less simultaneously discover somebody who can powerfully and uniquely perform in ways that they cannot themselves (e.g., p. 75). Collective behavior, he contends, is generated by highly restricted situations in which actors have no other path for the possible realization of interests except panic or flight (e.g., p. 201). Influential intellectual opinions are attributed to transfers by individuals of cognitive self-control to specific collective entities, (such as *The New York Review of Books*), which are consciously conceived of by the actor as “knowing better.” Popular fashions are attributed to the fact that individuals and organizations have decided that, in order to “look better,” they must transfer their control over style to somebody else (e.g., pp. 85–86). Attributing status is really just a matter of saving time (p. 234). One longs in such discussions for Shils, or even Bourdieu.

VI

In Coleman’s theory of conjoint and disjoint authority structures, this anti-Weberian argument for empowerment-via-vesting is systematically developed. As a result, it is here that its inherent contradictions are most difficult to sustain. Charismatic and primordial organizations are conjoint because they depend on the coincidence of goals. Because there is a natural identity of interests in such situations, the appearance of

voluntaristic action is easy to maintain. In disjoint authority structures, however, actors' individual interests are assumed to be divergent or pluralistic; as such, they have no intrinsic self-interest in the outcome of organizational power. This creates the free rider problem, which threatens to make rational action theory incompatible with the collectivist position.

To solve purely theoretical and transcendental points, Coleman often turns for evidence to historically specific situations. Although this certainly makes for arresting reading, it lessens the credibility of his broader argument, which must be couched in universal terms. In this case of the problems presented by disjoint authority, Coleman suggests that solutions to the free rider problem are to be found in the automobile industry (pp. 430–446). “Forward policing” of employees has typically been the practice, such that the consequences of badly made products are fed back into the organization via the market for consumer goods. That this has not tamed the free rider can be seen, Coleman suggests, from the continuing shoddiness of many American cars. When the Japanese introduced employee-based quality control circles, they not only found a way to make better cars but invented a new form of organizational control. By deeply involving line workers in what were once considered staff decisions, “backward policing” can solve the free rider problem without giving up the commitment to rational calculation. In fact, Coleman believes that his vesting theory allows us to discover a new evolutionary development in social practice. Spreading from Germany and Japan to Sweden and the world, backward policing should be seen not as an ad hoc solution but as a new stage of social organization (p. 435). Because it is part, moreover, of the “general movement in Western societies ... toward industrial democracy,” the preservation of voluntarism inside of collectivities seems increasingly assured.

These empirically inflated overstatements, I suggest, reveal the seams of Coleman's theoretical logic. We will soon see how this logic eventually bursts, confronting Coleman with the unwelcome, coercive implications of the theory he employs.

VII

It is perhaps his anxious anticipation of this eventually that leads Coleman into one of his most intriguing theoretical forays, which concerns the notion of rights. At key points in this book, Coleman draws inspira-

tion from jurisprudence. Much of this inspiration is unfortunate, for it gives Coleman a brief to translate normative *prescriptions* for self-control and individual responsibility into analytical *descriptions* of empirical behavior. In his discussion of rights, however, Coleman has benefitted from legal thinking, for it encourages him to incorporate normative controls into his otherwise instrumental frame.

Coleman's rationale for addressing rights reveals the kind of double vision that continually threatens to disrupt his behaviorism. Confronting the fallacy of materialist epistemology, he argues that exchange cannot be limited to physical goods, indeed, that exchange consists, in and of itself, more often in communication about goods than in the transference of goods themselves. What is actually transferred, Coleman points out, are not objects and activities but the rights to control them.

This important insight leads Coleman, knowingly or unknowingly, completely outside of rational actor models. In Habermas's terms, he has left the world of strategic action for communicative action. In his own terms, he has gone beyond notions of objective structures to subjective ones (p. 50). This understanding leads, in turn, to a moral rather than structural version of collective order. If organizations emerge from the transference of rights, then organizations are collections of intentions or promises, not things and forces. "Structures of control," Coleman argues, should be seen more correctly as "rights of control." Organizations are controlled not by force or authoritative dictate but by constitutions, which formulate the rights and obligations of control. More fundamentally, however, rights themselves are collective, since they depend on "intersubjective consensus." These sources of collective control, in other words, exist only insofar as those who are affected by organizations accept the distribution of rights without dispute: "A right exists only when there is general consensus among the relevant actors about which actor holds the right. When that consensus is absent, the right does not exist" (p. 67; cf., pp. 50, 470).

Introducing the rights concept allows Coleman to suggest a multi-dimensional model of collective control. Organizational conflicts involve not only disputes over interests but arguments over rights, their identity and their distribution. Rights, therefore, depend on both power and recognition (p. 52).

This discussion is fascinating and important. When push comes to shove, however, it has the same residual status as Homans's earlier, and

equally significant, discourse on justice (Alexander 1987: 182–194).⁵ To put Weber's famous aphorism into a different context, theoretical logic is not a streetcar that one can get on or off at will. Once riders pay their money, they must stay on the track for the whole trip. By introducing rights, Coleman tried to get off the rational choice trolley, but he did not pick a very hospitable place. He ties rights to consensus in an entirely implausible way, suggesting thereby that voluntarism must be complete and utopian, or not at all. When he comes back, as he must, to the reality of interest conflict and maldistribution of resources, Coleman treats it not merely as empirical fact but as presuppositional revelation. If there is inequality, he concludes, rights cannot do their theoretical work (e.g., p. 348). Norms do not mediate interest conflict. With the notion of thoroughly consensual rights, the free rider problem is solved too well; so well, in fact, that it cannot be solved at all.

Coleman gets back on the rational choice trolley with time to spare. Superordinates, it now turns out, do not give up their power, despite the fact that they have acquired it only in the form of rights that they had promised to repay (e.g., p. 81). The transfer theory of organizations had held power to responsiveness because it maintained that organizational position remained part of the world of continuous transaction. Coleman buttressed this theoretical fait accompli with confident predictions about empirical developments and hopeful exclamations about rights. The critical points in *Foundations* are those that undermine this transfer theory; they hinge upon his insistence that certain conditions hold – historical, ideological, theoretical – such that each of these theoretical strategies must now be considered null and void.

Coleman's argument goes something like this. Contract theory describes an event only at time t ; at $t + 1$, the originating contract no longer holds. The empowering transfer of rights occurs at time t ; afterward, at time $t + 1$, it is oligarchy and power, not exchange and recognition, that rules. There can be no social contract for actual, living actors, for each is born into the situation of $t + 1$.

It is by such reasoning that Coleman begins to insist that collectivities are in the saddle, and they are riding individuals.⁶ There can now be only "implicit consent" (p. 350), which amounts to no real consent at all. Recognition falls out as an independent enforcer of rights. "Power and interest determine relevance," he asserts (p. 68). "An actor is relevant to the determination of where the right is lodged only if he has an interest [and] the power to support his claim" (ibid.; cf., p. 334).

Theoretical logic has thwarted Coleman's theoretical ambition. In order to stick to his rationalist frame, he has been forced to abandon agents to the collective structures within which most of them live. Rights were hypothetical; they are not relevant to the empirical case. If societies have large collectivities, they cannot have civil societies. There is only power and interest, with no effective value mediation or solidarity at all. Coleman's insistence on theoretical consistency has left him in a difficult position. For he has been forced to demonstrate that the combination of rational action and collective structures undermines individual independence.

VIII

I believe that it is the effort to escape from this dilemma that, more than anything else, leads Coleman into his sentimental discourse on modernity. He devotes 150 pages to the proposition that collective structures are coercive because of an empirical, not a theoretical fact: under the conditions of contemporary rationalization, collectivities have taken an "abstract" form. In the traditional world, there were only "natural actors," whether individuals or collectivities. In this natural situation, reciprocity really existed and norms really were central (e.g., pp. 576, 651, 655). With the invention of the corporation – a legally supported fiction that is the basis for modern conjoint authority – collectivities give up their natural form: "The development of corporate actors has meant that natural persons are no longer the sole social units among whom relations can be said to exist" (p. 541). The result is that "society is moving in the direction of a dependent population" (p. 458). Modern persons are "slaves" (p. 552) to the very structures that, according to Coleman's transfer theory, should necessarily be under their (at least) partial control.

Coleman's empirical analysis of modernity has fallen victim to the contradictions of his theoretical work. When he offers the distinction between "the old corporate actors," which preserved freedom because transfers were governed by primordial ties, and "purposively constructed corporate actors" (p. 552), whose abstraction takes this earlier empowerment away, he has gotten himself into a great deal of trouble. Were medieval churches more responsive to individual action, for example, than contemporary universities? Were feudal lords more responsive to the landless peasants than middle managers to their salesmen and clerks? Were women, or polluted racial castes, or Jews

empowered by the primordially that defined their subjected status? Has it not been the very abstraction of modern law, and the very universalism that allows the abstract rather than particularist definition of citizens' corporate rights, that have allowed whatever increases in self-control there has been for primordially dominated groups? If this is not the case, one wonders, indeed, what sense can Coleman make of constitutional democracy at all? After all, it is the very formalization of its codes that has so often provided the very framework for extensions of substantive rights (Alexander, "Bringing Democracy Back In," in Lemert, *Intellectuals and Politics*, Sage Publishers, 1990).

To these conundrums Coleman would not, I believe, have any principled reply. He has spent his general theorizing on the topic of purposive organizations, not on the degree of primordially or abstraction within them. He has insisted, after all, that purposiveness means rationality and calculation. There is, in effect, no room for sentiment and morality in his systematic theory of social control. Nor should there be any need for it, since according to his theory purposiveness itself ensures voluntary action.

It is because of this systematic insistence on purposiveness as rationality that Coleman has had to reinvent the state of (primordial) nature. Looking back at the history of social thought, it is hardly surprising that this imaginary condition is necessary to save contract theory from itself.

Notes

1. It might be noted here that in these discussions, as elsewhere (e.g., p. 485), Coleman views the antinomy to purposive as expressiveness, which he describes as psychological and individualistic action, and which he links, quite inexplicably, to Durkheim. The contributions of most of this century's most seminal minds are absent from *Foundations*; none is more sorely missed than Durkheim's.
2. To see the inadequacy of this perspective, one need only contrast "information" with "knowledge," as Tominaga (*Information and Its Function*, Tokyo, Japan; The University of Tokyo Press, 1988) has pointed out in a brilliant essay. Information is purely cognitive and, as such, cannot necessarily lead to right or effective action. Knowledge, by contrast, depends upon connecting cognition with emotional and interpretive frames. Only in this combination can actors have true understanding. Coleman's emphasis on information as the key motivator of right action is connected with his emphasis on evaluation research as central to a good society. This social engineering approach is implicitly elitist. It ignores the central role in social reform of social movements, which not only produce their own organic intellectuals

but new valuations. For this latter emphasis, see the important new work of Eyerman and Jamison (*Social Movements: A Cognitive Approach*, London: Polity Press, 1990).

3. According to psychoanalytic theory (A. Freud, *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, 1936), denial is one of the most useful mechanism of defense. I employ the term to suggest that Coleman undoubtedly is utterly sincere in his belief that he is theorizing the micro-to-macro link as such rather than only a particular version of it. While there certainly is "deceit" here, it is not of a calculated or conscious variety. This deceit, moreover, is motivated by intellectual and cognitive, not psychological, necessity. In the technical terms of theoretical logic, Coleman's move amounts to a conflation of the problems of action and order. On the one hand, the solution to the action problem is presented not as a true choice but as something forced by exigencies of order: Coleman defends rationality (the action question) on the grounds of methodological individualism (the order question). On the other hand, Coleman's approach to order is presented as if it involves no commitments on the action question at all: he argues that, beyond the rational actor model, there simply has been no theorizing about the micro-to-macro link. The "deceit" that camouflages reduction is one of the most significant strategies in modern social thought (Alexander, "Reduction and Deceit in Social Theory," in Herminio Martins, editor, *Knowledge and Passion*, New York: International University Press, forthcoming).
4. In speaking about this argument in terms of first and last, now and then, I am taking theoretical liberties with the narrative structure of Coleman's own text, which veers back and forth in even more inconsistent if intelligible ways.
5. Rights are only the most significant residual category that Coleman introduces in the course of his effort to stave off involuntary control. Norms are the topic of an entire chapter, only to be reduced by a series of arguments to merely another means of maintaining the maximization of utility (pp. 249 ff.). In another chapter (pp. 503–530), Coleman acknowledges that the self might well be so internally fragmented that calculations of interest are next to impossible. After trying out the idea that each self-fragment engages in rational calculations vis-à-vis the other, he concludes that, in any event, knowledge about internal motivation is probably irrelevant to his theory. In a discussion of internalization (pp. 292–299), he acknowledges that the phenomenon of identification would make it impossible for agents to differentiate their interest from possibly superordinate others, which would make it impossible, in turn, to assess whether vesting in an external structure would be rational or not. In a discussion of religious schools (p. 320), ideology becomes central to the moral solidarity of religious schools, as do utopian ideas for revolutionary success (pp. 487–489). To resort to residual categories in such a persistent way points to fundamental limitations of the underlying theory.
6. How different, indeed, from portraying individuals as free riders!