

Editor's Introduction¹

Canons, Discourses, and Research Programs: Plurality, Progress and Competition in Classical, Modern, and Contemporary Sociology

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IN THIS MULTIVOLUME anthology, I present the long, often circuitous, sometimes glorious, and always compelling history of sociological theory and research in a manner that is rather different from the traditional approach. Instead of describing its wide ranging diversity as an uneven but ultimately triumphant march of accumulated knowledge, I will suggest there is a relativity at the heart of the sociological enterprise, one that represents an irrefutable dimension of the human sciences more generally. The relativity comes about because sociology is a human science rather than a science of nature. Max Weber understood the implications of this fateful distinction, but Marx, Durkheim, and Parsons did not. Yet, this fundamental fact explains the very distinctiveness of our discipline and our science, whatever that term may actually mean. It explains why Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Parsons are still living classics, and why, at the same time, none among them could ever succeed in shaping the past, present, or future of sociology in their own image. Sociological practitioners can never be as certain of their knowledge as natural scientists, and even when they feel certain, they aim to use their knowledge not only for explaining the world but also for changing it, that is, for moral purposes. These are the critical differences between what Dilthey immortally termed the *Geisteswissenschaften* and *Naturwissenschaften*.

The deficit of certainty and the surplus of moral ambition help us understand why sociological knowledge, far from being linear and cumulative, is actually organized into a plurality of competing traditions. At any given

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time in the history of the discipline, there has existed more than one legitimate, sanctioned, and productive way of describing and explaining the same empirical phenomenon. These multiple explanations are not random: they reflect the structures of competing traditions, not the whims of the individual researchers and theorists. At a particular time, one tradition may be more legitimate, and thus seen as rising; others may be less popular, and viewed as in decline. This trend might continue until one tradition effectively disappears, although the distinctive orientations to the world it embraces will certainly at some point be taken up again, as new traditions form. Yet, at some later point, the ascending and declining fortunes could also be reversed. Whether one particular explanation or description seems true at a given point in disciplinary time has less to do with its explanatory power, in some objective sense, than with its non-scientific ability to persuade, to gain legitimacy among members of the scientific community.

This emphasis on the traditional and the arbitrary does not mean that there is nothing dynamic in the model I am presenting here. Not only is there a constant shifting between the fortunes of different traditions, but the continuous competition between different points of view means that the clear boundaries between different traditions often breaks down.² Traditions borrow from one another, often without acknowledging they are doing so. In addition to the fact that hybrid traditions continually emerge, another result of competition is that any particular tradition may become unimportant, and that new traditions can be created.

It is for these reasons that in this multivolume set the contributions of classical, modern, and contemporary sociology are organized in terms of Marxist, Weberian, Durkheimian, functionalist, and interactionist traditions – rather than around empirical topics in and of themselves. But the distinctiveness of this organization goes beyond the emphasis on traditions over empirical topics. Further, it breaks these traditions down into three different instantiations: canonical writings, critical discourses, and research programs. Canons and critical discourse, of course, immediately suggest such “non-scientific” disciplines as theology, literature, and philosophy. This is my intention. Despite our scientific ambitions, and our rational commitments – or perhaps even because of them – we must acknowledge and embrace the intermediate position that sociology holds between natural science and humanities.

Yet, while informed by non-empirical concerns, sociology is far from being only an art. It has a commitment to persistent and disciplined explanation of the empirical world. For this reason, the intense competition between different traditions not only ensures that there will be multiple charismatic figures, or classics, but that there will be a continuous stream of philosophical, interpretive, and exegetical arguments about the meaning of their canonical writings, about why and in what ways one canon is

superior to another. So, in addition to the classical "canons," there is a second kind of tradition-framed discourse in sociology: the world of "critical discourse," i.e., the secondary literature that develops which is apologetic or polemical vis-à-vis the other traditions and established genres.

Finally, there is also the everpresent demand that each tradition must instantiate itself in the empirical, objective world, proving itself according to the natural scientific logic of experimentation. This explains why there is always a third component of the history of sociological traditions – the research program. Thus, the competition between different points of view pushes beyond the construction of canons and beyond the critical discourse about them to the creation of empirical exemplars that demonstrate the applicability of traditions to observation and explanation. Some of these efforts have the look and feel of natural science; others contribute to a more qualitative, case-study genre of rational observation based on textual interpretation and ethnography. Whatever the genre, these empirical efforts aim to create programs of research into different social sectors, for example, into stratification, integration, religion, deviance, social change.

The importance of research programs, and their often fruitful results for both pure knowledge and social practice, whether political or policy oriented, tends to create the illusion that sociology is, in fact, nothing more or less than a naturalistic science. The existence of canons and discourse is often hidden, both from the public and from the consciousness of social scientists alike. But, in fact, they always are present, and they always frame empirical research in fundamental ways. Research into stratification, revolutions, city life, marriage and family, and criminology is never simply empirical. It is always organized by plural and conflicting communities of researchers, who see themselves as guided by particular classical canons or by hybrids of them, and by the critical discourse that interprets them. There are Marxist, Neo-Marxist, and Post-Marxist, Weberian, neo-Weberian, and Marxist-Weberian, Durkheimian and late-Durkheimian, and functionalist and neofunctionalist studies of stratification, status, race, gender, revolution, and class, and interactionist approaches of many different kinds.

This is the explanation for the organizing framework of *The Sociological Traditions*. In what follows, I will develop the rationale for this approach in much more detail. After doing so, I will turn to the substance of the traditions that are presented in this book. For classical and modern sociology, I will describe the core of the classical canons, which often have changed over time; the main issues of dispute in the critical discourses, which have often shifted as well; and some of the principal elements of the research programs that have emerged from the efforts to instantiate these traditions in the social world. In conclusion, I will turn my attention to contemporary sociology. I will show how a series of vital current controversies continue to reflect the kinds of discursive disputes that have been laid out here.

**The Distinctiveness of the Human Sciences:
The Centrality of the Classics in Sociology**

Positivism is the philosophical basis for the quasi-natural science view of sociology that the presentation in this book militates against. Until very recently, however, positivism supplied the dominant theory of how knowledge cumulates and declines in sociology.

Positivism: The Equation of Natural and Social Science

Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of positivism in its social scientific form is the effort to forge a strong identification with the natural sciences. The social scientific proponents of positivism assert that if any boundary at all exists between the social and the hard science, it is minuscule. Sociologists are urged to embrace the methodological apparatus and procedures of the supposedly more mature, physical sciences.

This positivist position defined the thinking of the classical writers whose works are canonized today. In his introduction to the German edition of *Capital*, Karl Marx explicitly likened his scientific efforts to physics. Durkheim, in *The Rules of Sociological Method*, persistently spoke of sociology as a science, comparing it to biology. He instructed his colleagues to investigate "social facts" with the same dispassionate objectivity that hard scientists purportedly brought to their study of nature. Talcott Parsons, though more sophisticated about the role of theory, claimed to be following the path of physics and biology in his sociological writings.

In fact, the Frenchman who invented the term "sociology," August Comte, argued forcefully for the construction of an unbridgeable boundary between the science of society and speculative philosophy. Sociology was to be as devoid of "metaphysical" commitments as were the sciences of nature. This "positive science," as Comte called it, would consist entirely of propositions, laws, and causal statements. Interpretations and value judgments – what I have referred to above as critical discourse – would not intrude. In good part, this effort to wed the fledgling enterprise of sociology to the more prestigious natural sciences represented a transparent maneuver to wrestle legitimacy, status, and material resources from the established scientific community, the state, and the wider public. This motivation no doubt continues to compel many of the assertions about the "purely objective" character of sociology that are made today. But not only material self-interest was, or is, at stake. Ideal interests have always been present as well. In the long run, these have proved even more difficult to overcome.

Postulates of the Positivist Persuasion

Long after sociology had become well-established in the state and within the public at large, a broad "positivist persuasion" continued to provide it with a unifying, if rarely articulated creed. That persuasion rested upon a series of postulates that still inform the work of many sociologists today. First, it is asserted that a radical break exists between empirical observations and nonempirical statements. If this is granted, there logically follows the notion that factual statements and observations can be hermetically separated from theoretical generalizations. What follows from this is that generalized "intellectual" issues – philosophical questions, logical questions, discursive claims, value statements – have no significance for sociology, for the latter can be a purely empirical science. The conclusion is that scientific progress can be made simply on the basis of observation. Theories are significant, but they follow from, rather than in any way precede, empirical observations of social fact. It is held that theories are, in fact, primarily inductions from external observations. What follows from these arguments is the belief that what decides truth in sociology are critical empirical tests: experiments that produce factual observations that falsify or validate theoretical generalizations.

According to this positivist persuasion, there is simply no relation between "tradition" and empirical observations or theoretical generalization. Nor can there, *ipso facto*, be a plurality of theoretical frameworks which appear equally compelling, the effect of which is to relativize any given observation. Nor is there the possibility, much less the necessity, for scientific disagreement to be adjudicated by recourse to generalized, nonempirical, critical discourses. If the positivist persuasion were right, in other words, the schema by which we have organized the contents of these eight volumes would simply not make any sense.

The Postpositivist Response

In the last thirty years, however, developments in the history and philosophy of natural science have thrown increasing doubt on the positivist persuasion. A broad postpositivist movement has emerged. It is composed of different points of view but it shares a set of general assumptions whose repercussions have had extraordinary effects on our understanding of what it means to understand the world. In the first place, postpositivism has demonstrated that even natural science is not a direct reflection, or mirror, of the physical world. Theories are not inductions but conjectures, highly contestable interpretations of observations and of empirical tendencies that are ambiguous at best. Historians of science have been vital to this revolution in the philosophy of science by demonstrating that nonempirical elements have

played a fundamental role in generating the kinds of conjectures and interpretations that constitute scientific theories, even the most successful ones. They have demonstrated, for example, the effects of a scientist's personal religious or political beliefs, the significance of broad public sensibilities, the role played in the scientist's formulations of economic developments and historical events. Such historical studies have pointed, in other words, to the very kinds of elements that the positivist persuasion has denied any effect.

On the basis of such philosophical and historical arguments, the critics of positivism in sociology have asked: If positivism does not adequately explain the accumulation of knowledge in the natural sciences, how can its precepts continue to be dutifully accepted as dictums for social science today? Those who have continued to defend the progressive qualities of the physical sciences, however, have pointed out that, despite the purported role of nonempirical elements, the sciences of nature have continued to demonstrate an impressive ability to provide increasingly accurate descriptions of the empirical world. This accuracy is difficult to ignore in the kind of technologically based, information society we live in today.

The Positivist Case Against the Classics

That nonempirical inputs are not incompatible with accurate empirical perceptions is, indeed, an important insight, one that will be affirmed in our later emphasis on the pluralistic yet still cumulative nature of social science. Yet the vital question still remains: What is the relevance of natural science to social scientific practice? If there are nonempirical inputs to natural sciences – and in light of postpositivism this can no longer be disputed – why don't we see the kinds of continuous reference to classical "canons" in the writings of natural science practitioners? Why is there no appreciable role in natural science for generalized, critical discourses? For the indisputable fact is that we do not. In practice, natural science consists primarily of research programs. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once wrote that "a science which hesitates to forget its founders is lost."³ A later historian of science observed that "every college freshman knows more physics than Galileo knew, whose claim is higher than any other's to the honor of having founded modern science, and more too than Newton did, whose mind was the most powerful ever to have addressed itself to nature."⁴ If natural science does indeed present a picture of empirical progress and factual accumulation, then perhaps the social sciences should eschew canons and discourses as well? Is social scientific practice, with its constant reference to classics and its pervasive critical discourse, off on the wrong track? Is it still immature in contrast to a more fully developed natural science? If we are to understand the rationale for the structure of this book, we must find an answer to this question.

In an influential argument first formulated more than fifty years ago, Robert Merton railed against what he called the merging of the history and systematics of sociological theory.⁵ His model for systematic theorizing was the natural sciences, which consisted almost entirely of codified empirical knowledge and precise, empirically-referenced covering laws. Scientific theory is systematic, then, because it can be tested through experimental procedures that compare fact with speculation. This is what allows steady accumulation of true knowledge. Insofar as there is such a condition for the steady growth of knowledge, Merton suggested, there is absolutely no need for classical texts. "Canons," consisting of widely referenced classical texts, exist only in fields where progress is impossible, fields like painting, literature, and music. In the humanities, Merton writes, "each classical work – each poem, drama, novel, essay, or history – tends to remain a part of the direct experience of succeeding generations." In a real science, by contrast, the "commemoration of the great contributors of the past is substantially reserved to the *history* of the discipline" – it does not enter into what is considered the contemporary practice of the discipline. In Merton's idealized and positivist world, in other words, interpretation and critical discourse about sociological classics would remain, but they would constitute a discipline called the history of sociology, not sociology, in either its theoretical or empirical forms.

Merton was confident that sociology was, in principle, scientific rather than humanistic, despite what he viewed as the confusions in the practice of social scientists of his day. He invoked Max Weber's confident assertion that "in science, each of us knows that what he has accomplished will be antiquated in ten, twenty, fifty years" and Weber's insistence that "every scientific [contribution] asks to be 'surpassed' and outdated." Merton urged sociologists not to confuse arguments about the classics – critical discourse – with sociological arguments about reality. Such arguments were, in fact, history or philosophy, not sociology. To confuse these, Merton warned, was to succumb to "intellectually degenerate tendencies." It would be degenerate because it would reveal an anti-rational idealization of "illustrious ancestors" and a mindless commitment to dogmatic "exegesis" of sacred texts. Merton condemns such practices because they engage in "erudition" rather than "originality." At all costs, sociologists should avoid "commentary," "critical summaries" and "critical synopses". Instead, they should treat earlier texts in a utilitarian way, mining them for "previously unretrieved information" which can be "usefully employed as new points of departure" for research programs.

The Postpositivist Case for the Classics

This famous argument against the centrality of the classics – which like every brilliant insight has become classical itself – assumes that to the degree a

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discipline is empirical, it will be cumulative, and that, to the degree it is cumulative, it will not produce classics. But despite the elegance of this syllogism, it is clear that its logic does not hold. As I have suggested earlier, the major developments in the philosophy and history of science since Merton's time have demonstrated that natural science does indeed contain nonempirical elements. In terms of the role of classics in a particular scientific discipline, therefore, it cannot be a matter of whether a discipline is empirically-oriented or not. It is, rather, a matter of the consensus within that discipline about nonempirical things. It is this lack of consensus that marks social as compared to natural science.

The critical point is this: The epistemology of a scientific discipline – the nature of the processes of knowing that inform its practitioners – does not determine the particular topics to which scientific activity is allocated inside of it. By allocation of scientific activity, I mean the degree to which the practitioners of a science do empirical work, focus on technical questions of methodology, or engage, as well, in more speculative, interpretive, and discursive activity. It is precisely the allocation of such activity that determines a discipline's relative empirical or nonempirical texture – whether it “feels like” a science, an art, or a humanity. Thus, even the most outspoken antipositivist epistemologists have acknowledged that an explicit and exclusive focus on empirical questions distinguishes the activity of natural science from its social scientific counterpart. For example, Gerald Holton, an historian of science who has painstakingly demonstrated that arbitrary, supra-empirical “themata” affect modern physics, insists that it was never his intention to argue for the introduction of explicitly “thematic discussions ... into the *practice* of science itself.” Indeed, he suggests that “only when such questions were ruled *out of place in a laboratory* did science begin to grow rapidly.”⁶ Even the forthrightly idealist epistemologist Charles Collingwood, who broached the eloquent argument that scientific practice rests upon metaphysics, insists that “the scientist's business is not to propound them but only to presuppose them.”⁷

The allocation of scientific activity depends upon what is considered by practitioners to be scientifically problematic. In the modern era, natural scientists tend to agree about the generalized, nonempirical commitments which inform their craft. As a result of this consensus, it is more empirical questions that usually receive their explicit attention. This is exactly what allows “normal science,” in Thomas Kuhn's famous phrase.⁸ Only if there is wide disagreement about the background assumptions that inform a science do nonempirical issues come into play. Kuhn calls these periods of intense disagreement “paradigm crises,” and he believes that it is only during such periods that there is “recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals.”

Classics versus Exemplars

Rather than classics, natural science has what Kuhn called "exemplars." By exemplars, Kuhn refers to concrete examples of effective empirical studies. While exemplars certainly *contain* metaphysical and nonempirical commitments, they are themselves models of explanation and observation. Exemplars are not classics. One reason is that they are quickly discarded, as one vitally important empirical study soon gives way to the next. Another reason is that they do not generate critical discourse about their meaning but, rather, empirical applications and extensions.

Social science also has exemplars: recent models of applied methodology and theory that are employed as guides to ongoing empirical study. But it also has classics, and in the practice of social sciences these are much more important. The ratio between exemplars and classics is so radically different in social science because in its social application science produces so much more disagreement. Because there are conflicts over questions like human nature, human action, social order, and political values – which are persistent, endemic, and enduring – the kinds of general background assumptions which remain implicit and relatively invisible in the natural sciences come vividly into play in the social sciences. One way of putting this is to say that the conditions which Kuhn defines as producing exceptional paradigm crises in the natural sciences are routine in the social. There is not merely an occasional "recourse to philosophy and to debate over fundamentals," but continuous engagement in critical discourse of this kind. Because of the vast disagreements that are endemic in the social sciences, its nonempirical presuppositions are always open to scrutiny. Sociologists are always "going back to fundamentals." They are always seeking "higher" and more "authentic" sources for the legitimation of their work. That is precisely why sociology has classics, and why the critical discourse about them is so central to this field.

There are functional and intellectual roles that classics serve. The functional reasons are the most important, and also the least appreciated. Yet, while necessary, they remain insufficient to explain why classics appear.

The Functions of the Classics

Because disagreement is so rife in social science, serious problems of mutual understanding arise. Without some baseline of minimal understanding, however, communication between members of different sociological traditions would be impossible. For disagreement to be possible, it must be carried out in a coherent and consistent way. This means there must be a language that remains shared between those who are disagreeing. The participants in a conflict must have a pretty good idea of what each is talking

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about, even when they sharply disagree over whether the topic of conversation is right or wrong.

This is where the classics play such a functional role. They provide an integrative language for the field of theoretical conflict in the social sciences. For to mutually acknowledge classics is to have a common point of reference. A classic reduces complexity. It is a symbol which condenses – in the sense of “standing for” – a range of diverse ideological and intellectual commitments. Condensation has several distinct functional advantages.

- It simplifies theoretical discussion by allowing a very small number of works to substitute for – to represent by a stereotyping or standardizing process – the myriad of finely-graded formulations which are produced in the course of intellectual life. When we discuss the central issues of social science in “classical” terms, we refer to complex issues by making such statements as “according to Marx what wrote about the economy” or “as Durkheim understood the division of labor.” We do not really address, nor we must even fully understand, every specific element in the classical formulations to which we refer. What we lose in specificity, however, we gain in mutual understanding and in the facility of communication. By speaking in terms of the classics, we can be relatively confident that those whom we address will at least know whereof we speak, even if they do not recognize in our discussion their own particular position. So, if we wish to evaluate the variety of critical analyses of capitalism today, we will undoubtedly begin by placing “Marx’s *Capital*” as a benchmark. For only by doing so will we be relatively confident that others in this far-spread and highly fragmented scientific community are able to follow, and will perhaps eventually be persuaded by, our ideological and cognitive judgements. (See the selections by Baran and Sweezy and Braverman below.)
- Classics allow generalized commitments to be evoked and disputed without the necessity for making the criteria for their adjudication explicit. Since such criteria are difficult to formulate, and virtually impossible to gain agreement upon, this concretizing function of the classics is very important. Rather than having to define equilibrium or the nature of social systems, one can argue about “Parsons,” about the relative “functionality” of his early work on action or his later work on evolution, about whether “Parsons” can explain conflict or not. (See the selections by Lockwood, Dahrendorf, and Rex below.) Similarly, rather than explicitly exploring, in abstract terms, the nature and truth of an emotion versus normative centered perspective on human action, one can argue that Parsons, or Durkheim, was normative, and that to avoid being a “Parsonian” one must move toward an affectively based perspective. (See the selections by Wrong and Joas below.) Because the

condensation provided by the classics gives them such privileged power, reference to the classics becomes important for purely strategic and instrumental reasons. It is in the immediate self-interest of every ambitious social scientist and every rising school to be legitimated vis-à-vis the classical founders. Even if a sociologist actually has no personal concern for the classics, he or she must still make a public presentation of criticizing, re-reading, and "rediscovering" some aspect of classical writings if their new perspective on empirical reality is to gain wide acceptance in the sociological field.

The Intrinsic Intellectual Qualities of the Classics

These seem like cynical reasons for the existence of classics because they refer to the functions that classics perform rather than to anything about their intrinsic qualities. It is, of course, precisely the intrinsic quality of a work that is normally cited as a reason for it to be accorded classic status. Yet, while classics as such must exist for functional reasons, whether any particular work qualifies as a classic does depend, to no small part, on its genuine intellectual quality.

In the human sciences, the achievement of scientific mastery depends less on existing methodological codes and exemplars than on the scientist's personal qualities, on his or her unique aesthetic, interpretive, generalizing, and observational abilities. In this respect, social science is like art: its great moments depend on randomly distributed human abilities. Producing great social science is a gift which, like the capacity for creating art, does not get better over time. Dilthey, the philosophical founder of hermeneutics, once wrote that "life as a starting-point and abiding context provides the first basic feature of the structure of the human studies, for they rest on experience, understanding and knowledge of life."⁹ Social science, in other words, cannot simply be learned by imitating an impersonal empirical problem-solution. Because its object is life, it depends on the scientist's own ability to understand life. It depends on idiosyncratic abilities to experience, to understand, and to know. In her introduction to her new translation of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Karen Fields makes exactly this kind of observation:

I recommend this classic in sociology for reading today, even though the ethnography is outdated, and the outlook upon gender quaint, because it presents the opportunity to encounter a dazzlingly complex soul whose burden of life animates the work. It is this same burden that animates great art. *Formes* has not only the steady brilliance of a classic but also a certain incandescence. It is like a virtuoso performance that is built upon but leaps beyond the tech-

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nical limits of the artist's discipline, beyond the safe striving merely to hit the correct notes, into a felt reality of elemental truth. To read it is to witness such a performance. The illuminations are public, the performance personal.¹⁰

There are at least three different ways in which such personal knowledge of a social scientist can distinguish itself in a classical way.

- *Through the interpretation of states of mind.* To understand motives accurately – a fundamental requirement of social science – depends upon highly-developed capacities for empathy, insight, and interpretation. All other things being equal, the works of social scientists who manifest such capacities to the highest degree become classics to which those with more mundane capacities must refer to gain insight into the subjective inclinations of humankind. The strength of Durkheim's studies of suicide and religion, for example, depend on his remarkable ability to intuit the cultural meaning and psychological import of self-destruction and ritual life. (See the selections from these studies below.) Weber's entire thesis about the elective affinity between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism depended not upon observation and correlation but on his ability to sympathetically empathize with such Puritan ministers and English and American capitalists. (See Weber, "Puritanism and Confucianism" and "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions," below.) Similarly, it is not Erving Goffman's use of the exemplars of symbolic interaction or his methodological technique that are transforming his recent studies into modern classics. It is, rather, Goffman's extraordinary sensitivity to the nuances of human behavior and his imaginative ability to conceptualize these nuances in striking and systematically related concepts. Few contemporaries will ever be able to achieve Goffman's level of insight or conceptual control. His works are becoming classical because one must return to them in order to experience and to understand just what the nature and forms of interaction imply. (See the selection by Goffman below.)
- *Through the reconstruction of the empirical world.* Because there is such intense disagreement among social scientists about the nature of the world "out there," the capacity for selection and reconstruction becomes correspondingly highly important. Once again, we find here a quality that is typically associated with art: the creative and idiosyncratic capacity for representation. As Dawe once wrote about the classics, "through the creative power of their thought ... they reveal the historical and human continuity which makes their experience representative of ours."¹¹

Thus, contemporaries may be able to make lists about the ideal-typical qualities of urban life, but few will be able to understand or represent anonymity and its human implications with the richness or vivacity of Simmel himself. (See the selection by Simmel on urban life below.) Or, to put the matter even more bluntly, has any Marxist since Marx been able to produce an economic-political history with the subtlety, complexity, and apparent conceptual integration of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*? (See the selection from this work below.) Has any social scientist been able to communicate the nature of “commodities” as well as Marx did in his first chapter of *Capital*? (See below.) How many contemporary analyses of feudal society approach the complex and systematic account of economic, religious, and political interrelations that Weber produces in the chapters on patrimonialism and feudalism in *Economy and Society*? (See below.) This is not to say that in significant respects our knowledge of these phenomena has not surpassed what Marx and Weber knew, for of course it has. It is to say, however, that there are, in fact, certain very critical respects in which our knowledge has not surpassed theirs. The works I have mentioned here were so unusual – so marked by the extraordinary personal qualities of their authors – that they simply could not be understood, much less critically evaluated or incorporated into research programs, by contemporaries. It has taken generations of critical discourse to recapture, piecemeal, the structure of these arguments, with all their intended and unintended implications. The process is ongoing still today. Is it any different with great works of art, e.g., with Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* or Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*? What is critical to realize is that the same cannot be said for Newton’s *Principia*. It was well and fully understood in its time. What Whitehead said for natural science must be inverted for the social sciences: A science that cannot remember its founders is lost!

- *Through the formulation of moral and ideological evaluations.* One of the enduring differences between social and natural science is that the former must provide compelling self-reflection on the meaning and justice of social life. This is its ideological function in the broad, Geertzian sense of the term.¹² Effective ideology depends not only on a finely-tuned social sensibility but on an aesthetic ability to condense and articulate moral reality through appropriate and persuasive rhetorical tropes. The more persuasive the ideological material, the more classical its status becomes. The soulless character of rationalized modernity is not just observed but imaginatively created by Weber’s tragic and forlorn concluding pages of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, by his exquisitely strained paeans to the anti-modern irrationalities of the aesthetic and erotic in “Religious Rejections of the World and Their

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Directions" (see the selection below), and by the austere real-politik and barely submerged irony of his essay on bureaucracy (see below). To understand rationalized modernity, one cannot merely observe it: one must return to Weber's classical work in order to appreciate and experience it once again. The same can be said for Georg Simmel's writings about the tragedy of modern culture or the deracinating effects of capitalism in his *Philosophy of Money* (see below).

We might conclude in this way. Merton was quite right to suggest that social scientists tend to merge the history and systematics of sociology theory. He was also thoroughly justified in attributing this merging to "efforts to straddle scientific and humanistic orientations." He was wrong, however, and disastrously so, to suggest that the merging, or the straddling which produced it, are pathological. From the beginning of the systematic study of society in ancient Greece, to the most contemporary discussions of rational choice and comparative social mobility, merging and straddling have been endemic to the practice of social science. To read this situation as abnormal is to suggest the impossible. Sociology cannot, and should not, shed its discursive and classical forms.

Classical Traditions and Rational Accumulation

Sociology still aspires to be a cumulative science, but it no longer can couch this aspiration in a positivist manner. A generation ago, sociologists shared a fervent belief, so characteristic of modernism, that cumulation would come if only they "got their hands dirty" in the empirical world. This meant, in effect, that sociologists believed they should concentrate on methodologies, whether qualitative or quantitative, for these techniques would provide ever more direct and subtle access to the empirical world.

Today, for a large and growing number of postmodern sociologists, this modernist vision of progress seems to have been a mirage. The contrast between an earlier generation's ardent faith in the possibility of scientific growth and the deep uncertainty that contemporary social scientists often express about the goals and practices of social science is striking. In postmodern social science, skepticism has supplanted faith, and disillusionment and radical relativism sometimes seem to be the logical accompaniments of contemporary sociology.

This need not necessarily be the case. The positivist persuasion must certainly be dispensed with. But to recognize the plurality of scientific perspectives, and their necessary contextualization in historical and cultural time and place, is not to give up on the project of making sense of the world. It is not necessary, in fact, to give up on the project of accumu-

lating more accurate and more useful information. Sociology will never simply be a reflection of the social world "out there." But neither does it develop without any relation to it. The challenge is to conceptualize theory and method, concept and observation, fact and value in a manner that gives proper recognition to both art and science.

Rationality and Tradition

Sociology is fragmented, plural, classicized, and tradition bound. It will never look like a natural science. Yet it is rational nonetheless. There are classical canons, yes, but not even for the most enthusiastic canonizers, not to mention those outside their influence, are canons simply taken as the modern equivalent of divine truth. Their validity, to the contrary, must be demonstrated time and time again. Each demonstration is subject to open and competitive scrutiny, and the legitimacy of any particular classical canon is never assured.

The competition between the frameworks established by traditions generates intense critical discourse, which in turn produces increasing knowledge about the implications of that tradition's theoretical and empirical claims. The intense competition also demands that contemporaries substantiate their inherited ideas in empirical studies, and the results of these studies are continuously compared to those in other traditions to see which are more successful at revealing the nature of the social world.

The result is that, over the course of time, each of the traditions of sociology has become more complex and more refined, broadening its explanatory reach, and making more nuanced its theoretical claims. The traditions have generated an increasing range of research programs, and these programs have become more inclusive and more precise. None of this makes any single tradition, or any particular research program, "true" in the naïve, positivist sense of unequivocally reflecting the factual world. It does suggest, however, that there is kind of social scientific "cunning of reason" at work, as Hegel once suggested in his effort to create a universal history.

Despite the irrationality of any particular individual move or disciplinary development, and despite the role of charisma and the antirational adulation of classical founders, it might well be claimed that there is often, though certainly not always, a rational thrust to sociology as a whole. The discipline is rational not only in the sense of leading to more accurate perceptions and, often, to increased control over social pathologies, like poverty, social diseases, and various forms of unjust domination. It is also rational in the sense that the continuing plurality of traditions allows sociology to accurately express, to simultaneously reflect and refract, the multiple realities, values, ideologies, and sensibilities that inform the historical world. As this world changes, so will the sociology that crystallizes the

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world's own extra-scientific preoccupations. The very emergence of post-modern social science can be seen as rational in precisely this way.

Schools and Carrier Groups

The various forms of sociology carried forward by traditions are commonly referred to as "schools." Sociology can be defined, in fact, as a multilevel rational discourse about society and its constituent units, with the patterns and directions of that discourse being conditioned by the schools that form the discipline's dominant traditions at any particular time. The elements of this definition are paradoxical but not necessarily contradictory. Traditions are patterns of perception and behavior that are followed, not because of their intrinsic qualities or pragmatic effectiveness, but rather because they have authority by virtue of their being inherited from the past. The traditional status of social scientific schools confers upon them prestige and authority, which may or may not be reinforced by organizational power and by a supply of material resources. For example, Marx's theoretical ideas did not become classical simply because they were brilliant and powerful, which indeed they were. They become classical because they were energized by carrier groups, in the early days by members of the scattered communist and socialist party activists and "workingmen's associations," even while they were ignored almost entirely by academics and researchers in well-funded universities.¹³ Today, the classical status of Marx's ideas is "carried" in exactly the opposite way. In the West at least, few status or class groups, or political organizations, are committed to historical materialism. In the universities, by contrast, so-called "critical theory" continues to be a forceful and energetic presence.

Empirical Rationality and Scientific Research Programs

These considerations, however, do not mitigate the rational aspirations of social science, the manner in which its debates are limited, for example, by the insistent demand for proof, logic, and substantiation. In modern and post-modern societies, traditions must be continually responsive to change. In social science, this openness is intensified by the universalism of the officially institutionalized standards of disciplinary evaluation. The resulting norm of impersonal rationality is never realizable as such, but it pushes consistently against the particularism that the bindingness of traditions can often imply. It also forms a vital part of the disciplinary tradition itself. Despite and because of its traditional character, then, social science has continually demonstrated an extraordinary ability to approximate and understand social reality, and in this manner provide the grounds for acting upon it. It was, after all, not simply its popularity among workingmen's groups that made Marx and

Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* so immensely popular after its publication in the late 1840s and early 1850s. It was also the fact that, simultaneous with its publication, revolutions broke out throughout the most advanced capitalist countries in Europe. Marx's ideas, in other words, seemed to be verified, in a most empirical way, by the actual developments of his day. This does not mean that they were true, however, in the natural scientific sense.

Canons

Like other traditions, the rational movements in social science are founded by intellectually charismatic figures, whose followers believe their founder's magnetic power stems from his or her awe-inspiring scientific prowess. If the historical and institutional conditions are appropriate, and if the founder's work is sufficiently complex and insightful, the charismatic intellectual will be considered a "great" sociologist and may, for a time at least, be accorded the status of a classical figure. The writings of this figure are then taken to form what literary theorists call a "canon," a set of writings that afforded a decisive intellectual status, whose genial importance and worth are taken for granted, as something that "goes without saying."¹⁴

In this book, Volumes I and II lay out the canonical writings of classical and modern sociology. In fact, there are few classics and, taken all together, only a small body of canonical work. Herbert Spencer was once considered a classical figure, yet he does not appear in this book, for this anthology is not a history of sociology. That Durkheim himself attributed classical stature to Spencer is demonstrated by the difficulties that one has today in comprehending the underlying polemic of Durkheim's first book, *The Division of Labor in Society*. For in critical respects it was a polemic against Spencer, yet the nature of Spencer's work was never laid out in Durkheim's book because Spencer's ideas, at that time, went "without saying." Yet, while Spencer was lionized, Marx was not accorded anything like a classical status by social scientists of his own day. Fortunes are made and fortunes are reversed. The writers who today are unequivocally acknowledged to be charismatic great thinkers are Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and George Herbert Mead. Simmel has also become classicized in the last twenty years, though it is highly doubtful that his writings appear nearly as often in courses on "classical" sociological theory as those of the other four figures. In the modern period, there is only one figure who is treated as a classic, Talcott Parsons, but this status is equivocal and has undergone deflation and re-inflation since his death. Erving Goffman's work is only entering the early stages of canonization. In my view, however, it seems clear that Goffman and Parsons eventually will be paired as the two great American sociological thinkers of the twentieth century.

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Thus, disciplines that purport to be oriented to the contemporary empirical world and to the accumulation of objective knowledge about it have continuous recourse to texts by writers who are long dead and gone. To see the peculiarity of this situation – its “un-scientific” quality, in Merton’s positivist sense – one must remember recall that a classic is a work of human exploration that is given a privileged status vis-à-vis contemporary explorations in the same field. The concept of a privileged status means that contemporary practitioners believe that they can learn as much about their field through understanding this earlier work as they can from the work of their own contemporaries or, indeed, from any purely empirical research they might themselves conduct. To be accorded such a privileged status implies that, in the day-to-day work of the average practitioner, deference is accorded without prior demonstration; it is accepted as a matter of course that such a classical work establishes fundamental criteria in the field. Social scientific traditions define themselves by staking out theoretical cores that are defined by canonical writings which, by definition, are highly resistant to change. Yet, despite such canonical claims to eternal importance, the philosopher and historian of science Imre Lakatos has shown that what counts as the center and periphery of a reigning scientific tradition – what is defended as a true core and what is represented as less important to the maintenance of the tradition – is continually in flux.¹⁵

We will now turn, in what must necessarily be a brief and very schematic manner, to the traditional cores that have been established by the discipline’s canonical texts, both classical and modern, and to some of the processes of canonical change. Each of the works cited in this discussion is anthologized in the volumes of this book.

The Canons of the “Great Traditions”

Marx

There have been two phases to the Marxist canon in sociology. Until the 1950s, the core was defined as unequivocally materialist, determinist, and revolutionary, as exemplified by *The Communist Manifesto*, certain sections of *Capital* volume I, *The German Ideology*, and the “Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right.” In the latter early fragment reflecting his transition from Hegelian philosophy to more social scientific thought, Marx established his base-superstructure model, describing the mode of production – basically the economy and its accompanying property apparatus – as the force determining the nature of all the ideational processes that formed consciousness and mental and emotional activity. In *The German Ideology*, written at around the same time, Marx and Engels affirmed the primacy of material conditions, their separation from the purely “mentalist” conceptions of

culture, and the manner in which the capitalist division of labor established the entire character of contemporary societies. In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels emphasized that classes were determined by property relations – possession, or lack of it, of the means of production. They also maintained that the consciousness and political orientations of classes flowed directly from these economic considerations. The technological and property relations characteristic of capitalism ensured that the central conflict in society would be defined by the intense economic conflicts between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, with the middle and agrarian classes fading away.

These theses were reaffirmed but stated in an immensely more sophisticated and scholarly manner in Marx's *Capital*. In the chapter on "The Reproduction of Labor Power," Marx explained that the salary of a laboring man could never exceed the price required for the simple reproduction of his labor power, a factor that guaranteed the worker would never share in the growing profits of an increasingly productive capitalist economy. Instead, the worker would be paid purely according to his barest physical needs, since factory labor required neither education nor creativity nor mental labor of any kind. In *Capital's* chapter on "The Struggle for the Working Day," Marx affirmed his sociological determinism by demonstrating that the reforms established by the British government to shorten the working day had nothing at all to do with political democracy, the relative independence of public opinion from economic stratification, or the significance of legal universalism. Instead, the reforms to the working day were portrayed as the result simply of the greater power of the British proletariat.

By the 1950s, this original core of the Marxist canon had become undermined both by shifting social structures and by a half-century of critical discourse. The effect of these social and intellectual shifts was to highlight the importance of ideology, consciousness, and subjectivity, to downplay the role of economic immiseration, and to move away from economic determinism toward a mediated understanding of causality. I will speak more about the nature and sources of this shift in my discussion of critical discourses, below. Here I wish simply to point to the changes that they produced in the core and periphery of the canon itself. While the "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts" of 1844 had been recovered and were published in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, they did not come to international attention until the 1950s. When they did so, they caused a storm of controversy by presenting an entirely different kind of "Marx." Still under the influence of Romanticism, in 1844 Marx had written extensively about the subjective and emotional experience of alienation. By clearly suggesting that the consciousness of such estrangement would play a part in triggering revolutions, and that the overcoming of alienation would play a part in structuring the postrevolutionary society, these early writings had the effect of undermining the objectivist, base-superstructure model of the Marxist canon in its earlier form. Indeed,

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the so-called early writings pointed more to links with psychology and cultural anthropology than with economics. It was partly as a result of this inclusion into the canon of the early writings, and of other influences as well, that in the 1960s *Capital* began to be read in a sharply different manner. Rather than the series of economic laws that Marx himself had believed to be the work's most important contribution, it was the first chapter on the magical and irrational "fetishism" caused by the "commodity" form of capital and labor-power that came to be emphasized above all others. This chapter was taken to describe the cultural forms of capitalist society, particularly the manner in which its abstraction and generality concealed instrumental rationality and exploitation. Finally, alongside this growing emphasis on elements in the Marxist canon that separated the products of consciousness from direct association with economic life, there developed an entirely new appreciation of the importance of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. The reason had to do with the independence from economic pressures that Marx had allowed, in this historical essay, to the French state. He showed that Louis Bonaparte had been able to present himself as all things to all people, thus implicitly acknowledging that political life in capitalist society was not necessarily determined by class power.

As these "idealist" elements of Marx's corpus came into the center of his canon, the writings about economics and class struggle were pushed to the periphery. They were accorded increasingly less importance, and whether they were proved true or false was not considered essential Marx's canonical status.

Weber

Developing his theory in more or less direct opposition to the early Marxist canon, Weber created a body of work that today remains more widely revered than that of any other figure. The canonical texts are, first and foremost, those from his study of Puritanism, represented in this book by Parts 1-3 of the "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions." Here Weber countered the canonical writings of Marx on the origins of capitalism by declaring that ideas and subjective feelings played a decisive role. He insisted that the economic ethics of classes were formed by religion rather than by relationship to property alone. Countering Marx's determination of consciousness and political ethic by economic class position, Weber asserted in "Class, Status, and Party" that politics varied independently of economic position because "parties live in a house of power" - a position quite consistent with the *Eighteenth Brumaire* in the later Marxian canon. With his concept of status group, Weber suggested that powerful, closed, and self-interested groups formed around very non-economic issues, such as religion, race, and ethnicity. In doing so, this canonical text implicitly

argues that "honor" had by no means disappeared – as Marx and Engels had predicted in the *Manifesto's* declaration that "All that is holy is profaned."

Weber developed a theory of this relatively autonomous state in his discussions of the types of legitimate authority, which introduced a moral focus directing social scientific attention to the question of whether brute power could gain voluntary consensus. Distinguishing charismatic and traditional authority from legal-rational, Weber not only offered a new way to understand the social-psychological-cultural underpinnings of social movements but pointed to the role of non-economic phenomena such as law in a modern society, whether capitalist or not. However, in "Bureaucracy," perhaps his most canonical political piece, Weber emphasized the anti-democratic nature of modern power, exposing the impersonality that had nothing to do with capitalism but with broader tendencies of modern rationalization. Foucault's later writings on power-knowledge implicitly derive from this line of Weber's work.

While Weber's canon has not undergone the same kind of bifurcation of core and periphery as Marx's, one can see that some texts recently have gained more attention. This has been true above all for the essay "Religious Rejections," whose later sections have been read as a description of the fragmentation of the postmodern world and of the systematic tendencies to opt out of rationalization by seeking inner or outer transcendence in a religious or secular mystical way. For reasons we will explore later, contemporaries are less interested in the origins of asceticism than in the origins of romanticism and hedonism, for it is the latter that increasingly characterizes the postmodern world. Another text that was once virtually ignored but has been highlighted more recently is Weber's discussion of the city in *Economy and Society*, which has been published as a separate book in its own right. This is the only section in Weber's writing where he discusses citizenship as a legal status that allows class struggles to point toward greater inclusion rather than to exclusion and further upheaval. It is at odds with Weber's earlier canonical texts on bureaucracy and party struggles. During the Cold War and the wave of democratic revolutions that followed in its wake, however, it was hardly surprising that this once relatively unknown essay would become part of the core of the Weberian canon.

Durkheim

The instability of post-World War I Europe and the fluctuation of international reputational and generational influences had undermined the continuous expansion of Durkheim's and Weber's reputation and influences in their native countries after their deaths. Only with their translation and publication in English, under the aegis of Talcott Parsons and coincident with the expansion of American sociology, did their writings become

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canonized. From the 1940s onward, they came to be regarded as founders of the now international discipline.

During this period, Durkheim's canon has shifted in ways that bear some similarities to Marx's. In the 1930s to the 1960s, for sociologists "Durkheim" was the man who laid out the positivist methodological foundations of the discipline, in his seriously misunderstood but also seriously contradictory essay *The Rules of Sociological Method* (see my "Durkheim's Secret Rules" selection below). This work was viewed by generations of sociologists as a warning against "interpretive", culturally-oriented empirical studies, and as a justification for concentrating exclusively on external measures and quantitative data about social trends. Sociologists also took as canonical Durkheim's other two publications from the 1890s, *The Division of Labor in Society* and *Suicide*. The former was read as a brief for an equilibrium-oriented structural functionalism. Just as Weberians had ignored the latter sections of "Religious Rejections of the World and their Directions," so Durkheimians read *Division of Labor* in a partial way, virtually neglecting its third, highly critical "Book," which explored the pathological division of labor in contemporary capitalist societies. Only the first two-thirds of Durkheim's 1893 book was canonized; it was taken as modelling how social institutions produce complementary activities and how these activities become amicably regulated by normative rules. *Division* was the canonical bifurcation of history into traditional versus modern, with the programmatic implication that modern societies are based on practical and rationally oriented, e.g., "restitutive," kinds of morality and sanctions. As for *Suicide*, it was considered the quintessence of how a multivariate quantitative analysis should be employed to produce powerful theoretical models.

As with shifts in the canon of Weber and Marx, Durkheim's work began to be read differently because of movements toward postmodernity in society and because of incremental but ultimately decisive, related developments in critical discourse about the meaning of his canon. The key shift here was to the "late Durkheim," just as, slightly earlier, there had been the movement to early Marx. Between its publication in 1911 and the late 1960s, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* had been treated by social scientists as canonical for social anthropology, and later for structuralism, but as almost completely irrelevant to the sociological study of contemporary societies. Yet by the 1980s *Elementary Forms* had become central to Durkheim's canonical core inside sociology, helping to inspire and direct the discipline's new cultural turn. *Rules* and *Suicide*, in turn, have become increasingly peripheral, and *Division of Labor* is now viewed in a more complex manner that focusses on the neglected third Book as much as on the earlier sections. An essay like "Individualism and the Intellectuals," which illuminates the quintessentially "late Durkheimian" phenomenon of "the cult of the individual," had been virtually unknown before Robert Bellah translated and published it in his

Durkheim collection of 1974. Today it is widely cited as an example of how Durkheim's approach in *Elementary Forms* can be brought into the analysis of a secular, highly differentiated society. A similar process has occurred with the lectures posthumously published as *Socialism*. When they first appeared in English, Alvin Gouldner introduced them in a manner to align Durkheim with the critical-capitalist tradition. Today, the book is cited, to the contrary, as another example of Durkheim's anti-materialist and symbolic approach of the later work.

The Canons of the "Little Traditions"

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim constituted the "big three" canons of twentieth century sociology. From the mid-century period on, however, even as these traditions continued sharply to repudiate one another, they became challenged forcefully from micro-traditions of interactionist sociology, on the one hand, and less directly but perhaps equally powerfully from Talcott Parsons' structural-functional synthesis on the other.

Interactionism: Microsociology

The resolutely macro focus of the big three canons has framed the manner in which a series of less influential but still vital traditions have been understood within the disciplinary matrix of sociology. In principle, it would have been possible for each of these "little" traditions to become, in and of themselves, as important as the big three. What happened, in fact, was something quite different. They were seen as counter-balancing responses to the macro emphases of "the founders," and their canons were constructed as variations of what came to be called "microsociology." This is true despite the fact that such brilliant thinkers as Mead and Simmel were contemporaries of Weber and Durkheim, and long preceded Parsons, and that both had significant effects on disciplinary practice in their time. These effects, however, were by no means sufficient to warrant canonization by their contemporaries. It was only later, after the establishment of the Big Three and Structural-Functionalism, that the micro-traditions came into their own.

This is nowhere so clear as in the case of Simmel. Despite his great historical reach, his focus on face-to-face relationships and subjectivity made it possible for his mid-century followers to interpret him as an interactionist. His essay on conflict became the basis for exchange theory in sociology and for an anti-normative understanding of cohesion in social life. His work on small groups, and the decisive effects of numbers on interaction and stratification, made him an ideal reference for ecologically-minded mid-century writers and for small group theorists alike. Only in the last decade has Simmel begun to be reconstructed as the canonical

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founder of postmodern sociological theory. Here his critical works are the tragedy of modern culture, which exposes the fragmentation and ambivalence of contemporary life, and the *Philosophy of Money*.

Mead's work was significant in his lifetime primarily through his lectures, and through his philosophical influence on such early twentieth century American sociologists as Cooley. Only in the late 1930s, in response to the rise of Parsons and his school, did Herbert Blumer and his later students, like Anselm Strauss, begin to construct the canon of Mead that has become known today. This construction significantly underplayed the "generalized other" and Mead's links to the semiotics and language philosophy of his fellow pragmatist philosopher, Charles Peirce. Instead, it emphasized the role of gestures and self in face to face interaction. "Mead" became an interactionist. Only recently has John Dewey's work become more than irrelevant to sociologists. He has become discussed as a forerunner of communitarianism, on the one hand, and of democratic theories of communication and deliberation on the other.

Yet, if there is a single sociologist in the Meadian branch of interactionism whose work may eventually challenge Parsons and the "big three," it is neither Simmel nor Mead, but Erving Goffman. At first, Goffman was misunderstood as simply a Meadian. As he took on one new empirical arena after another, and piled up one brilliant conceptual schema upon another, however, his ideas have become viewed as establishing the basis for a new level of sociological analysis, which Goffman called "the interaction order" in his final paper. It is now understood that Goffman incorporated Durkheim, semiotic, and phenomenological ideas alongside his Pragmatic roots, and his work can be seen as a kind of American and sociological counterpart to the post-modern, anti-Enlightenment theories of Michel Foucault.

If there is one interactionist who showed a comparable originality to Goffman's, it was Harold Garfinkel. Garfinkel built on Schutz's notion of typification, which Schutz had derived from combining Husserl and Weber, and he combined it with Parsons' emphasis on normative order. But he constructed from these an extraordinarily original and fecund empirical understanding of normalizing behavior. In this last decade, however, this promising sociological application of the phenomenological method of bracketing has increasingly lost its influence on the disciplinary scene; it has been succeeded by a more empirically precise and scientific, but much less conceptually rich, research program called conversational analysis.

Structural-Functionalism

From the mid-1940s until the mid-1960s, the critical period for the establishment of "modern" international sociology, Talcott Parsons elaborated a body of work that, like Durkheim's but unlike Marx's, Weber's, or Mead's, became

canonized during his lifetime. Four emphases vis-à-vis classics and contemporaries were viewed as decisive departures and canonized as a result. The first was Parsons' ability to link micro studies of socialization and personality with macro theories of culture and social structure. No other classical theorist had done this before, and nobody, with the partial exception of Anthony Giddens, has done so since. The second was Parsons' theory of social values and his understanding of social systems as achieving stability by a process of institutionalization of this culture. Third was Parsons' model of society as differentiated between overlapping functional subsystems, whose interrelations were most systematically modelled in his AGIL model of the late fifties and sixties. Fourth, Parsons renewed Spencer and Durkheim's model of social change as a process of social evolution, adaptation, and growing differentiation. The reputation and importance of these four canonical areas of writing has waxed and waned over the last half century. After a period of sharp deflation, Parsons' classical status has been revived, particularly outside the United States. The four areas of conceptual innovation remain critical influences on what has often been called "post-Parsonian sociology," yet at this point, even as new anthologies and selections are beginning rapidly to appear, it is not clear which of Parsons' actual writings will continue to be read and revered over the next twenty years.

The Critical Discourses

It is because of the privileged position of canons that critical discourses of exegesis and reinterpretation of classics have always been a conspicuous current of sociology. For what is perceived to be the "true meaning" of a canonical work has broad repercussions for both theory and research. By discourse, I refer to modes of argument which are more consistently generalized and speculative than are "normal" scientific investigations, in Kuhn's sense. The latter are directed in a disciplined manner to specific pieces of empirical evidence, to inductive and deductive logics, to explanation through covering laws and to the methods by which these laws can be verified or falsified. Discourse, by contrast, is ratiocinative. It focuses on the process of reasoning rather than the results of immediate experience, and it becomes significant when there is no plain and evident, e.g., consensual, truth. Discourse seeks persuasion through argument rather than prediction through evidence. Its persuasiveness is based on such qualities as logical coherence, expansiveness of scope, interpretive insight, value relevance, rhetorical force, beauty, and rhetorical texture.

Positivists have always complained about the centrality of such discourse in the "scientific" field of sociology. Their reasoning is typified by Arthur Stinchcombe's insistence on describing Marx, Durkheim, and Weber

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as "those great empirical analysts ... who did not work mainly at what we now call theory" but instead on "explanations" and on "methods."¹⁶ Jonathan Turner complains in a similar way that "far too much social theory consists of the history of ideas and general hero worship of Marx, Weber, Durkheim" and other classics, and he calls, instead, for "doing theory as opposed to ... providing yet another meta-theoretical analysis of the early theoretical masters."¹⁷ Yet such complaints, following on Merton's classical but wrong-headed argument, thoroughly misunderstand the intermediate position of sociology between art and science. The point is not that the classics are discursive, for in most cases they were indeed exemplars or models of empirical work. The point, rather, is that, by becoming classics, works are converted from efforts at empirical explanation into objects of discursive reconstruction, for the functional and intellectual reasons I discussed above. There is nothing anti-rational, moreover, about the critical discourse that has permeated sociology over the last half-century. It has fuelled precisely the kind of competition between traditions that makes accumulation, hybridity, and new tradition creation possible.

About Marx

The critical discursive issue in the history of Marxism has been the fallacy of economic determinism. Despite Marx's own strong tendencies in this direction, his most brilliant followers have insisted that he really meant otherwise – from Engels' extraordinarily influential formulation of the "last instance" argument to Lenin's critique of economism to Gramsci's notion of ideological hegemony to Althusser's concept of overdetermination and Sartre's insistence on the autonomy of the act. The substantive offshoot of this reinterpretive effort has been the centrality of alienation and commodification. Lukács started this entire line of thinking with his essay, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," but such central 1960s works as Shlomo Avineri's pushed beyond Lukács' Leninism to read Marx in a decidedly Hegelian and democratic way.

About Weber

The discursive arguments over Weber's canon have centered around the by no means unrelated issue of whether domination or legitimation is central to his sociology. Parsons, Shils, and Eisenstadt developed a reading of Weber that extended his sociology of religion into his analysis of contemporary secular society by emphasizing professional norms and the relationship of status to charisma and cultural order. By contrast, Aron, Bendix, Roth, and Beetham rejected this more culturally-oriented interpretation and insisted that Weber saw society in a more top-down, power-directed, less

normative manner. The implication was that Weber's canon merely represents a more complex, less dogmatic, and more democratically oriented version of the kind of conflict theorizing of Marx. Schluchter's influential interpretations are finely balanced between these two schools, as is the more recent, postmodern reconstruction that stresses Weber's rejection of rationalization and his search for private satisfactions and exotic escapes.

About Durkheim

Durkheim's discursive reconstructions also have been pulled between more institutional and more cultural interpretations and between more conservative and more radical understandings of his work. Where Giddens presented Durkheim as a kind of non-dogmatic colleague of Marx, as an institutional and materialist theorist preoccupied by inequality and the evils of private property, Bellah viewed him as a liberal who valued individuation above all and new, more pluralistic forms of social integration. Whereas Coser condemned Durkheim as an organicist conservative, Habermas applauded his "linguistification of the sacred" that underlay the commitment to rationality. Parsons actually criticized Durkheim's early overemphasis on institutions, setting the stage for the emergence of "the late Durkheim," with his canonical resources of symbolic sociology.

About Parsons

In terms of the decades long critical discourse over Parsons, Merton and Kingsley Davis tried to normalize functionalism by arguing that it was neither conservative nor radical but a common sense explanatory model employed by sociological explanations of virtually every type. Lockwood and Rex established the interpretation that Parsons was a normative determinist and that his theory could conceptualize neither conflict nor social change, and Wrong laid out an influential but misleading reading of Parsons as emphasizing conformity because he emphasized the internalization of universalistic norms. Thirty years later this line of criticism remains intact, as Joas criticizes the Kant-Parsons emphasis on norms as incapable of theorizing creativity, a possibility he seems to think is reserved only for the anti-normative theories traditions of Pragmatism and interaction. Yet during the last two decades, sympathetic reconstructions of Parsons' canon have emerged in the context of a resurgence of economic liberalism, political democracy, and the end of the socialist alternative. Alexander placed Parsons in the social democratic tradition of positive liberties, suggesting also that autonomy had at every point been the undergirding of that functionalist work. Turner and Holton lauded Parsons as the only classical theorist to embrace the differentiation and individuation of modernity without nos-

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talgia and regret. Metzarios emphasized how Parsons' evolutionary theory had clearly anticipated the breakdown of communism and presented it as a non-ideological perspective on modernizing social change.

About Interactionism-Microsociology

Interactionist and microsociological theory has generated significantly less critical discourse. Simmel has only begun to receive the critical and exegetical attention his recently canonized work deserves. Lately, he has been reconstructed as the first postmodernist because of his fragmented and prismatic understanding of culture in contemporary life. Ethnomethodology was early on criticized as conservative because of its anti-structural bias, and later reconstructed by macrosociological theorists as providing an approach to the intuitive processes governing the lifeworld. Relatively little attention has yet been paid to behaviorist ideas of exchange theory, let alone to the manner in which the emerging classical canon of Goffman belies and transcends his usual stereotyping as a micro-theorist.

Much more extensive, and more worth noting, is the highly developed and gradually changing interpretation of Mead. In the years during and immediately after his life, Mead and the Chicago School of sociology he so influenced were not under demanding critical scrutiny from an opposing American school, nor did their representatives feel compelled to compete with European research programs of Durkheim and Weber. In these early years, pragmatic sociological studies were as much interested in cultural norms and the "generalized other" as in face-to-face interaction per se. After the emergence of Talcott Parsons, however, critical discourse attempting to define the distinctiveness of Mead emerged with increasing intensity. Blumer actually created the label "symbolic interactionism" to emphasize the individual level vis-à-vis what he viewed as the collectivism of Parsons. Blumer's perspective on the tradition was carried forward by the later insistence that the Meadian tradition illuminated the "negotiated" as compared to the "structured" character of roles and institutions and the "creative" as compared to "conformist" nature of social action. But dissident voices have also emerged, beginning with the notable argument by Lewis and Smith suggesting a split inside of Pragmatism between the more individualist nominalism of Dewey and James and the more collectivist realism of Mead and Peirce.

The Research Programs

Even if a sociologist's work is highly regarded for its theoretical subtlety and scope, and even if critical discourse develops around it, his or her body of

work will neither be canonized nor classicized unless it gives birth to a series of ongoing research programs. Correspondingly, brilliant research programs can, in and of themselves, never supply the sufficient basis for tradition-formation. They need to be complemented, and to seem to be informed by, some body of canonical work and the discourse generated thereby. Giddens would provide an example of the first case. He produced a body of theoretical work that has generated some critical discourse but virtually nothing by way of research programs. The result is that Giddens' theory is unlikely to be canonized. The work on status-attainment generated by quantitative studies of mobility presents an example of the second: a highly significant body of research results without being attached to classical theoretical work or critical discourse.

Yet, while research programs must be connected to canons and critical discourse, and thus are a fundamental ingredient of dominant traditions, they do not, and cannot, generally present themselves as triggered by extra-empirical considerations of any kind. Nor, in fact, are their specific empirical concerns necessarily deducible from the critical discourses about the canons to which they are, in fact, closely related. It would seem, rather, that the topics of each research program are generated by its conflicts and competition with the empirical studies generated by its opposing tradition, and also, of course, by the practical issues generated by long-term processes of social change.

Marxian

The foci of Marxist research programs have been generated by the failure of crisis to generate revolution (Baran and Sweezy); by the diminishment of crisis and class conflict itself (Althusser); by the ability of the capitalist-democratic state to initiate egalitarian forms (Miliband, Poulantzas); by the decline of the manual working class and the growth of the middle or white collar class (Mallet, Braverman, Gouldner); and by the introduction of new, more cultural issues like consumption, gender, and race as subjects for social conflict (Willis, Bourdieu). Each of these concerns has been investigated differently, depending on the particular branch of Marxist theory involved, but taken together they have contributed significantly to the advancement of sociological knowledge beyond anything conceived by the classical canon.

While responding to real world developments, these Marxist studies can also be viewed as generated by the conflict between traditions, for in virtually every case they have tried to enter areas once thought to be primarily Weberian in scope - the state, status distinctions, class fragmentation, and social taste. In its turn, the growth of the Weberian research program has been no different. On the one hand, it reflects the changing social concerns of the twentieth century. On the other, its specific claims

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have been generated by efforts to challenge and falsify the empirical predictions of Marxian research programs and core alike.

Weberian

In the broad field developing Weber's organizational sociology, Michels showed that an "iron law of oligarchy" dictated that socialist parties generated by class interests would eventually become bureaucratic and elitist, and would stifle class conflict and radical change. Lipset, Trow, and Coleman responded to this finding by trying to provide a more optimistic and democratic point of view. Their work demonstrated that there was not an iron law: unions could prevent oligarchy by allowing competitive elections for officials, a decision that has nothing to do with the intensity of the class struggle. For his part, Selznick challenged the iron law, and by implication Weber's organization approach more generally, not by pointing to elections but by bring to bear Weber's theory of charismatic leadership against Weber's bureaucratic model of administration. Powell and Dimaggio returned to a more pessimistic view of organization, but in a decidedly non-Marxist manner, by harnessing the inertial theory of bureaucracy to theories of practical action.

Other Weberian researchers redeployed the master's theory to explain the diminution of radical class conflict and, at the same time, to refute the Marxist canon's claims. While accepting that elites and classes are central, Aron argued that the fragmentation of classes, professional groups, and political parties made unity among upper class and lower classes impossible. Lipset showed that the autonomy of the state meant that even the most intense class struggles would end up, inevitably, taking a democratic form. T.H. Marshall studied how citizenship laws, rooted independently from class society, allowed class conflicts to promote egalitarian reform rather than revolution. Margaret Somers showed, in fact, that citizenship laws and egalitarian culture had existed in England centuries before the rise of capitalism.

The conflicts between the religious and political studies in Weber's canon are demonstrated by the fact that, despite the fame of Weber's original study of the Protestant ethic, relatively little research has actually been done to develop a program around the effects of religious ethics on political or economic behavior. Bellah's *Tokagawa Religion* was a notable exception, arguing that, in response to confrontations with modernity, changes toward asceticism in Japanese religion had been essential to the formation of a strong Japanese state in the late nineteenth century. Jesse Pitts investigated how the combination of aristocratic and Catholic traditions led to ideas about "prowess" that created an aestheticization of French cultural and social life.

Durkheimian

The early emphasis on Durkheim as functionalist and institutionalist was empirically instantiated by Merton's influential study "Social Structure and Anomie." Kai Erikson's *Wayward Puritans* employed Durkheim's solidarity theory without reference to culture and symbol, arguing that deviance is created when the actual boundaries of groups are vulnerable. By the late 1960s, however, empirical applications and innovations in the Durkheimian tradition became more directed by the shifting of Durkheim's core to the later work. Bellah's widely imitated study of American civil religion demonstrated the possibilities of using the later theory of traditional societies to study key elements of rationality in secular democratic ones. Douglas offered a semiotic translation of Durkheim's religious sociology of the sacred and profane to explain the continuing cultural significance throughout human history of pollution and purity, and Geertz and Turner redeemed the ritual idea for use in complex societies. Zelizer employed the notion of sacrality to study shifting ecological, economic, and legal institutions in early twentieth century America, and Alexander employed late Durkheimian ideas to understand the contemporary political crisis of Watergate.

Interactionist/Microsociological

In the creation and elaboration of research programs, the diversity and internal conflicts within interactionism/microsociology became increasingly evident. In the pre-Blumer research program of Meadian Pragmatism, Cooley elaborated a notion of the formation of a reflective, "looking glass" self, while Park demonstrated the macro-possibilities of Dewey's theory of the public. Afterward, Blumer pointed the way to a purely process-oriented approach to public opinion and social movements, and Hughes demonstrated the possibilities of studying work and the division of labor from the bottom up, focussing on the struggle for autonomy. Goffman later combined these programs with more Durkheimian ideas to create a new understanding of self-presentation in a dramaturgical way. At about the same time, Howard Becker created an alternative to the normative theory of deviance by showing that actors willingly choose outsider status and that they "learn" the status rather than "deviate" into it. Elijah Anderson, in a brilliant empirical study, has recently deployed Goffman's research program to understand how the public boundaries between white and black communities are maintained.

The distinctive cultural understanding of the more phenomenological approaches to interaction were displayed by Schutz's ethnographic study on making music together. Garfinkel's examination of changes in a person's sexual status displayed the empirical possibilities of his ethnomethodological

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version of phenomenology, which later became more purely pragmatic and less phenomenological in the research protocols for analysing conversation pioneered by Sachs and Schegloff. Blau's studies of social exchange and power in social life applied Homansian rational actor models to challenge the Weberian approach to bureaucracy. Hechter brought exchange theory directly into the lion's den – Durkheimian theory and research – by laying out a rational choice research model for studying group solidarity.

Structural-Functionalism

The early, more organicist phase of Parsons' theory was empirically elaborated in Davis and Moore's model of stratification as promoting motivated conformity to norms; via Aberle *et al.*'s programmatic statement about the functional requisites of society; through Cohen's work on deviance as a failure of socialized motivation; and in Williams' study of the plurality and institutional power of America's universalistic and individualistic values. Bellah's study of religious evolution and Smelser's of growing social differentiation during the industrial revolution instantiated the elements of the canon that set out Parsons' later theory of social change. Barber developed a critical version of the the normative approach to professions in his study of medical consent, just as Slater used Parsons' model of socialization to illuminate the high degree of role strain established during the process of gender identification. Eisenstadt and Alexander put the AGIL model to work explaining conflict between elites in their studies of political empires and news media respectively. The relation between critical discourse and research program can be seen in the fact that there is virutally no empirical carry-over from what arguably was one of the most creative phases of Parsons' theorizing, the late canonical works on the generalized media of exchange. The critical discourse of the late 1960s and 1970s had so damaged Parsons' reputation among contemporaries that the empirical possibilities of these ideas were never pursued.

Contemporary Controversies

In the waning years of the twentieth century and the opening years of the twenty-first, there appears to be significantly less importance attached to the classical and modern canons, a very noticable diminution of the critical discourse directed to them, and proportionately less time devoted to research programs bearing their names. This does not mean that the canon-discourse-research program is no longer relevant, but it may indicate the early stages of tradition replacement and creation.

One reason for the dimintion is the rise of the new historical framework created by postmodernism, which asserts that the earlier and modern

classics are theoretically particularistic and hopelessly out of date. Within this shifted narrative frame, postmodern canons are emerging to crystallize the new understanding of social life, yet they are primarily outside of sociology as it has been thus far understood. British sociology, for example, has been the only national discipline within which significant groups of theorists and researchers have made the postmodern turn, yet they have done so within the framework established by Michel Foucault, a philosopher and historian whose influence has developed, until recently, primarily within the humanities. In this collection, Seidman's theoretical essay, also related to Foucault, presents the case for postmodernism in a more specifically sociological way.

There are other reasons for the relative, but as yet by no means decisive decline of the established canons. There is the growing isolation of sociological theory, which has given way in importance to theories developed in political philosophy and humanistic cultural studies. There is also the shifting theoretical interests associated with the new social movements, which have placed ideas of race, gender, postcolonialism, environment, and sexuality squarely onto the sociological map. The implications of these latter developments are not yet clear. One can observe, for example, a number of contemporary efforts to develop race, gender, postcolonial, sexuality, and environmental theories as broad and distinctive traditions of thought, in effect replacing the traditions that have been traced here. This involves constructing alternative canons, critical discourses, and research programs, in much the same manner as developments vis-à-vis the new postmodern theory.

For all of this, I believe it can be said that the classical and modern traditions, whose canons, discourses, and research programs are outlined in this introduction and anthologized in the volumes of this book, are by no means dead. Nor, in the disciplinary field of sociology, have they by any stretch of the imagination yet been replaced, either in terms of the functions they perform as classics or the models they provide of intrinsic intellectual worth. Indeed, there are often striking continuities between the current controversies of recent decades and the traditions we have already laid out. If we look at the contemporary debate on the sociological underclass in America, for example, we see that William Julius Wilson takes a neo-Marxist position, Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton take a Weberian one, Elijah Anderson approaches the issue in a Goffmanian manner, and Orlando Patterson has recently developed a late-Durkheimian approach. Virtually the entire range of sociological investigation on racial poverty, in other words, occurs in terms of long-standing traditions, despite the fact that few of these studies ever acknowledges nonempirical inputs of anything other than a political kind. So it has been in feminist studies: Chodorow's critical socialization studies developed from Parsons' culture-personality theory;

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patriarchy theory (Sacks and Epstein) from Marxian and Weberian models of domination; cultural criticisms of dualistic gender binaries (Ortner) from Durkheim and his structuralist followers; constructivist and performative approaches to gender (Butler and Fishman) from interactionism and phenomenology. It is true that "race theory" and "gender theory" have also developed very different theoretical lines and debates that are specifically their own. When they become sociological, however, they often and perhaps even typically do so within single or hybrid versions of established traditions. Whether this will remain the case depends on whether existing traditions will continue to decline, whether they will be reconstructed, and whether the new extra-sociological traditions will be elaborated so that they become disciplinary traditions in their own right.

Similarly, the controversy over "micro-macro" theory that was central to sociological theories in the 1980s, and remains a continuing reference in empirical and theoretical studies today, broke down along the lines established by interactional (Collins, Coleman), neofunctionist (Alexander, Luhman), and Marxist (Bourdieu) traditions. The rise of "strong state" theories (Skocpol) marked a familiar Weberian departure from Marxist historical studies. The new thinking about nationalism (Anderson) was marked by cultural ideas stretching back to Durkheim and Weber. Insofar as the new democratic thinking has oriented itself in a sociological way, it is divided between the "critical" approach of Habermas, which can be traced back to Marxism, and the "communitarian" approach of Walzer, which has roots in the differentiation theory of Parsons, the solidarism of Durkheim, and the pragmatic emphasis on plural practices. If we look at the new cultural sociology, we can see that it has typically broken down in traditional ways. Stuart Hall's cultural studies derives from the Marxist tradition, combined with Durkheimian and structuralist ideas; Robin Wagner-Pacifici's dramaturgical approach combines Weber with Goffman and Turner; and Alexander's studies reflect Weber's sociology of religion and the late Durkheim's investigations of ritual and the division between the sacred and profane.

* * *

In this introduction, I have formulated the rationale for organization of this eight volume book. In doing so, I have introduced an unusual way of looking at the history and development of the sociological thought. Placing this approach in the postpositivist tradition, I have explained why, once the difference between the human and the natural sciences is recognized, it seems not only natural but rational for contending traditions to arise. I have shown why each tradition is, and must be, organized around canons, critical discourse, and research programs. On the basis of this new model, I then offered an overview of the studies that are anthologized in the volumes that

constitute this book. Closer examination of the works themselves will reveal the textures and subtleties that a schematic overview such as this must necessarily ignore.

Notes

1. To J.C. Alexander, ed., *Mainstream and Critical Social Theory: Classical, Modern and Contemporary*, London: Sage, 2001.
2. I draw here on important discussions with Paul Colomy. See Alexander and Colomy, "Traditions and Competition: Preface to a Postpositivist Approach to Knowledge Cumulation," pp. 27–53 in George Ritzer, ed., *Metatheorizing*, London: Sage, 1992, and also Alexander and Colomy, "Neofunctionalism Today: Reconstructing a Theoretical Tradition," pp. 33–67 in Ritzer, ed., *Frontiers of Social Theory: The New Syntheses*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990. I also draw here on Alexander, "The Centrality of the Classics," pp. 11–57 in Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner, eds., *Social Theory Today*, London: Polity Press, 1987, and on Alexander, *Theoretical Logic in Sociology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982–83), in particular the first volume, *Positivism, Presuppositions, and Current Controversies*.
3. "The Organization of Thought," in Whitehead's book of that name, *The Organization of Thought*, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, pp. 105–33. First published in 1917.
4. C.C. Gillispie, *The Edge of Objectivity: An Essay in the History of Scientific Ideas*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960.
5. Robert K. Merton, "On the History and Systematics of Sociological Theory" (1967), reprinted in Merton, *On Theoretical Sociology*, New York: Free Press, 1967.
6. Gerald Holton, *The Thematic Origins of Scientific Thought: Kepler to Einstein*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1973.
7. Charles Collingwood, *Metaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.
8. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, second edition.
9. Wilhelm Dilthey, "The Construction of the Historical World in the Human Studies," in *Dilthey, Selected Writings*, edited by H.P. Rickman, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976.
10. Karen E. Fields, "Translator's Introduction: Religion as an Eminently Social Thing," pp. xvii–lviii, Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, New York: Free Press, 1995, p. xxiv.
11. Allen Dawe, "Theories of Social Action," in T.B. Bottomore and R. Nisbet, eds., *The History of Sociological Analysis*. New York: Basic Books, 1978.
12. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books, 1973.
13. This is recently demonstrated by Francis Wheen in his *Karl Marx* (London: Fourth Estate, 1999), the first satisfactory biography of Marx that has ever been published.
14. In Ben Jonson's poem, "To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us," first published as a preface to the First Folio edition of Shakespeare's collected plays in 1623, seven years after Shakespeare's death, Jonson captured the sense of artistic canonization:

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Thou art a monument without a tomb,
And art alive still while thy book doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.

15. Imre Lakatos, "Criticism and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 69 (1969): 149-186.
16. Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968.
17. Turner, "Review: the Theory of Structuration." *American Journal of Sociology* 91 (1986): 969-77.