Text and Readings

4 EDITION

Classical & Contemporary SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

SCOTT APPELROUTH ■ LAURA DESFOR EDLES

Classical and Contemporary Sociological Theory

4th Edition

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Scott Appelrouth

California State University, Northridge

Laura Desfor Edles

California State University, Northridge

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

FOR INFORMATION:

SAGE Publications, Inc.
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Editorial Assistant: Tiara Beatty
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Preface

Every semester, we begin our sociological theory courses by telling students that we love sociological theory and that one of our goals is to get each and every one of them to love theory, too. This challenge we set for ourselves makes teaching sociological theory exciting. If you teach "sexy" topics such as the sociology of drugs, crime, or sex, students come into class expecting the course to be titillating. By contrast, when you teach sociological theory, students tend to come into class expecting the course to be abstract, dry, and irrelevant to their lives. The fun in teaching sociological theory is in proving students wrong. The thrill in teaching sociological theory is in getting students to see that sociological theory is absolutely central to their everyday lives—and fascinating as well. What a reward it is to have students who adamantly insisted that they "hated" theory at the beginning of the semester "converted" into theorists by the end!

In teaching sociological theory, we use original texts. We rely on original texts in part because every time we read these works, we derive new meaning. Core sociological works tend to become "core" precisely for this reason. However, using original readings requires that the professor spend lots of time and energy explaining issues and material that are unexplained or taken for granted by the theorist. This book was born of this process—teaching from original works and explaining them to our students. Hence, this book includes the original readings we use in our courses, as well as our interpretation and explanation of them.

Thus, this book is distinct in that it is both a reader *and* a text. It is unlike existing readers in several ways, however. First and foremost, this book is not just a collection of seemingly disconnected readings. Rather, in this book, we provide an overarching theoretical framework with which to understand, compare, and contrast these selections. In our experience, this overarching theoretical framework is essential in explaining the relevance and excitement of sociological theory. In addition, we discuss the social and intellectual milieus in which the selections were written, as well as their contemporary relevance. Thus, we connect these seemingly disparate works not only via theory but also via concrete applications to today's world.

Finally, this book is unique in that we provide a variety of visuals and pedagogical devices—historical and contemporary photographs, as well as diagrams and charts illuminating core theoretical concepts and comparing specific ideas—to enhance student understanding. Our thinking is this: Why should only introductory-level textbooks have visual images and pedagogical aids? Almost everyone, not just the youngest audiences, enjoys—and learns from—visuals.

In the fourth edition of this book, we have edited some of the primary readings so that students can better hone in on the central ideas. We also have added a section to the introductory chapter that highlights several key Enlightenment thinkers whose ideas illustrate the salience of the questions of action and order during a period of sweeping social, political, and cultural transformation. In the final chapter of this book we have added a section on Ulrich Beck, whose insights on the emergence of a "world risk society" have significant implications for combating climate change. Finally, we have included additional visual elements, contemporary applications, and examples.

As is often the case in book projects, this turned out to be a much bigger and thornier project than either of us first imagined. And, in the process of writing this book, we have accrued many intellectual and social debts. First, we especially thank Jerry Westby for helping us get this project started. It has now been well over a decade

since Jerry walked into our offices at California State University, Northridge, and turned what had been a nebulous, long-standing idea into a concrete plan. Diana Axelsen, who oversaw the first edition of this book through its final stages of production, made several critical suggestions regarding the layout of the book that we continue to appreciate. In the production of this fourth edition, we are grateful to the reviewers who provided important ideas for improving the book and the members of the SAGE production team: Jeff Lasser, Laureen Gleason, Tracy Buyan, and Tiara Beatty, all of whom made the process of finalizing this edition extraordinarily smooth. We thank them for their conscientiousness and hard work.

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About the Authors

Scott Appelrouth (PhD, New York University, 2000) is Professor of Sociology at California State University, Northridge. His interests include sociological theory, cultural sociology, political sociology, and social movements. He is the author of *Envisioning America and the American Self: Republican and Democratic Party Platforms, 1840–2016* (Routledge, 2019), as well as various articles on social movements, theory, and the controversies over jazz during the 1920s and rap during the 1980s.

Laura Desfor Edles (PhD, University of California, Los Angeles, 1990) is Professor of Sociology at California State University, Northridge. She is the author of *Symbol and Ritual in the New Spain: The Transition to Democracy after Franco* (1998) and *Cultural Sociology in Practice* (2002), as well as various articles on culture, theory, race/ethnicity, and social movements.

CHAPTER

1 Introduction

Source: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and *Through the Looking-Glass* by Lewis Carroll; illustration by John Tenniel. (1960) New York: Penguin. Used by permission.

Key Concepts

- Theory
- Order
  - Collective/Individual
- Agency
- Action
  - Rational/Nonrational
- Enlightenment
- Civil society
- Industrial Revolution
- Division of labor
- Counter-Enlightenment

"But I'm not a serpent, I tell you!" said Alice. "I'm a—I'm a—"

"Well! What are you?" said the Pigeon. "I can see you're trying to invent something!"

"I—I'm a little girl," said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day.

"A likely story indeed!" said the Pigeon, in a tone of the deepest contempt. "I've seen a good many little girls in my time, but never one with such a neck as that! No, no! You're a serpent; and there's no use denying it. I suppose you'll be telling me next that you never tasted an egg!"

"I have tasted eggs, certainly," said Alice, who was a very truthful child; "but little girls eat eggs quite as much as serpents do, you know."

"I don't believe it," said the Pigeon; "but if they do, why, then they're a kind of serpent: that's all I can say."

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865/1960:54)

In the passage above, the Pigeon had a theory: Alice is a serpent because she has a long neck and eats eggs. Alice, however, had a different theory: that she was a little girl. Yet it was not the "facts" that were disputed in the above passage. Alice freely admitted that she had a long neck and ate eggs. So why did Alice and the Pigeon come to such different conclusions? Why didn't the facts "speak for themselves"?

Alice and the Pigeon both *interpreted* the question (What *is* Alice?) using the categories, concepts, and assumptions with which each was familiar. It was these unarticulated concepts, assumptions, and categories that led the Pigeon and Alice to such different conclusions.

Likewise, social life can be perplexing and complex. It is hard enough to know "the facts"—let alone to know *why* things are as they seem. In this regard, theory is vital to making sense of social life because it holds assorted observations and facts together (as it did for Alice and the Pigeon). Facts make sense only because we interpret them using preexisting categories and assumptions—that is, "theories." The point is that even so-called facts are based on implicit assumptions and unacknowledged presuppositions. Whether or not we are consciously aware of them, our everyday lives are filled with theories as we seek to understand the world around us. The importance of formal sociological theorizing is that it makes assumptions and categories explicit and hence open to examination, scrutiny, and reformulation.

To be sure, some students find sociological theory as befuddling as the conversation between Alice and the Pigeon in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Some students find it difficult to understand and interpret what sociological theorists are saying. Moreover, some students wonder why they have to read works written over a century ago or why they have to study classical sociological theory at all. After all, classical sociological theory is abstract and dry and has "nothing to do with my life." So why not just study contemporary stuff and leave the old, classical theories behind?

In this book, we seek to demonstrate the continuing relevance of classical and contemporary sociological theory. By "classical" sociological theory, we mean the era during which sociology first emerged as a discipline and was institutionalized in universities (the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries). We argue that the classical theorists whose work you will read in this book are vital, first, because they helped chart the course of the discipline of sociology from its inception until the present time and, second, because their concepts and theories still resonate with contemporary concerns. These theoretical concerns include the nature of capitalism, the basis of social solidarity, the role of authority in social life, the benefits and dangers posed by modern bureaucracies, the dynamics of inequality, and the nature of the "self," to name but a few.

"Contemporary" sociological theory can be periodized roughly from 1935 to the present. However, the dividing line between "classical" and "contemporary" theory is not set in stone, and a few classical thinkers, such as W. E. B. Du Bois, wrote from the late 1800s right up until the 1960s! In identifying core contemporary theorists, we consider the extent to which a writer extends and expands on the theoretical issues at the heart of sociology. To a person, these thinkers all talk back to, revise, and reformulate the ideas of the "founding" theorists of sociology while taking up important issues raised by the social context in which they were/are writing and by the human condition itself.

Yet the purpose of this book is to provide students not only with both core classical and contemporary sociological readings but also a framework for comprehending them. This metatheoretical framework will help students navigate, compare, and contrast the central ideas of each core figure, as well as contemplate *any* social issue within our own increasingly complex world. Before we introduce this metatheoretical framework, however, we need to clarify exactly what we mean by "theory."

What Is Sociological Theory?

Theory is a system of generalized statements or propositions about phenomena. There are two additional features, however, that together distinguish scientific theories from other idea systems, such as those found in religion or philosophy. "Scientific" theories

1. explain and predict the phenomena in question and
2. produce testable and thus falsifiable hypotheses.

Universal laws are intended to explain and predict events occurring in the natural or physical world. For instance, Isaac Newton established three laws of motion. The first law, the law of inertia, states that objects in motion will remain in motion, while objects at rest will remain at rest, unless acted on by another force. In its explanation and predictions regarding the movement of objects, this law extends beyond the boundaries of time and space. For their part, sociologists seek to develop or refine general statements about some aspect of *social* life. For example, a long-standing (although not uncontested) sociological theory predicts that as a society becomes more modern, the salience of religion will decline. Similar to Newton's law of inertia, the secularization theory, as it is called, is not restricted in its scope to any one time or population. Instead, it is an abstract proposition that can be tested in any society once the key concepts that make up the theory—"modern" and "religion"—are defined and observable measures are specified.

Thus, sociological theories share certain characteristics with theories developed in other branches of science. However, there are significant differences between social and other scientific theories (i.e., theories in the social sciences as opposed to those in the natural sciences) as well. First, sociological theories tend to be more evaluative and critical than theories in the natural sciences. Sociological theories are often rooted in implicit moral assumptions that contrast with traditional notions of scientific objectivity. In other words, it is often supposed that the pursuit of scientific knowledge should be free from value judgments or moral assessments; that is, that the first and foremost concern of science is to uncover what *is*, not what *ought* to be. Indeed, such objectivity is often cast as a defining feature of science, one that separates it from other forms of knowledge based on tradition, religion, or philosophy. But sociologists tend to be interested not only in understanding the workings of society but also in realizing a more just or equitable social order. As you will see, the work of many theorists is shaped in important respects by their own moral sensibilities regarding the condition of modern societies and what the future may bring. Thus, sociological theorizing at times falls short of the "ideal" science practiced more closely (although still imperfectly) by "hard" sciences such as physics, biology, or chemistry. For some observers, this failure to conform consistently to the ideals of either science or philosophy is

a primary reason for the discipline's troublesome identity crisis and "ugly duckling" status within the academic world. For others, it represents the opportunity to develop a unique understanding of social life.

A second difference between sociological theories and those found in other scientific disciplines stems from the nature of their respective subjects. Societies are always in the process of change; the changes themselves can be spurred by any number of causes, including internal conflicts, wars with other countries (whether ideological or through direct invasion), scientific or technological advances, or the expansion of economic markets that spread new products, ideas, and ways of life across the globe. As a result, it is more difficult to fashion universal laws to explain societal dynamics. Moreover, we also must bear in mind that humans, unlike most other animals or naturally occurring elements in the physical world, are motivated to act by a complex array of social and psychological forces. Our behaviors are not the product of any one principle; instead, they can be driven by self-interest, altruism, loyalty, passion, tradition, or habit, to name but a few factors. From these remarks, you can see the difficulties inherent in developing universal laws of societal development and individual behavior, despite our earlier example of the secularization theory as well as other efforts to forge such laws.

These two aspects of sociological theory (the significance of moral assumptions and the nature of the subject matter) are responsible, in part, for the form in which sociological theory is often written. While some theorists construct formal propositions or laws to explain and predict social events and individual actions, more often theories are developed through storylike narratives. Thus, few of the original readings included in this volume contain explicitly stated propositions. One of the intellectual challenges you will face in studying the selections is to uncover the general propositions that are embedded in the texts. Regardless of the style in which they are presented, however, the theories (or narratives, if you prefer) that you will explore in this text answer the most central social questions, while uncovering taken-for-granted truths and encouraging you to examine who you are and where we, as a society, are headed.

Why Read Original Works?

Some students—and professors—maintain that the original works of sociology's founding figures are just too hard to decipher. Professors who hold this point of view use secondary textbooks that interpret and simplify the ideas of core theorists. Their argument is that you simply cannot capture students' attention using original works; students must be engaged in order to understand, and secondary texts ultimately lead to a better grasp of the covered theories.

However, there is a significant problem with reading only interpretations of original works: the secondary and original texts are not the same. Secondary texts do not simply translate what the theorist wrote into simpler terms; rather, in order to simplify, they must revise what an author has said.

The problems that can arise from even the most faithfully produced interpretations can be illustrated by the telephone game. Recall that childhood game where you and your friends sit in a circle. One person thinks of a message and whispers it to the next person, who passes the message on to the next person, until the last person in the circle announces the message aloud. Usually, everyone roars with laughter because the message at the end typically is nothing like the one circulated

at the beginning. This is because the message inadvertently is misinterpreted and changed as it goes around.

In the telephone game, the goal is to repeat exactly what has been said to you. Yet misinterpretations and modifications are commonplace. Consider now a secondary text, in which the goal is not to restate exactly what originally was written but to take the original source and make it "easier" to understand. Although this process of simplification perhaps allows you to understand the secondary text, you are at least one step removed from what the original author wrote.[1] At the same time, you have no way of knowing what was written in the original work. Moreover, when you start thinking and writing about the material presented in the secondary reading, you are not one but *two* steps removed from the original text. If the purpose of a course in classical sociological theory is to grapple with the ideas that preoccupied the core figures of the field—the ideas and analyses that would come to shape the direction of sociology for more than a century—then studying original works must be a cornerstone of the course.

To this end, we provide excerpts from the original writings of those we consider to be sociology's core classical theorists. If students are to understand Karl Marx's writings, they must read *Marx*, not a simplified interpretation of his ideas. They must learn to study for themselves what the initiators of sociology have said about some of the most fundamental social issues, the relevance of which is timeless.

Yet we also provide in this book a secondary interpretation of the theorists' overall frameworks and the selected readings. Our intent is to provide a guide (albeit simplified) for understanding the original works. This secondary interpretation will help you navigate the different writing styles often resulting from the historical, contextual, and geographical locations in which the theorists were rooted.

Navigating Sociological Theory: The Questions of "Order" and "Action"

The theoretical framework that we use in this book revolves around two central questions that social theorists and philosophers have grappled with since well before the establishment of sociology as an institutionalized discipline: the questions of *order* and *action* (Alexander 1987). Indeed, these two questions have been a cornerstone in social thought at least since the time of the ancient Greek philosophers. The first question (illustrated in Figure 1.1) is that of **order**. It asks what accounts for the patterns or predictability of behavior that leads us to experience social life as routine. Or expressed somewhat differently, how do we explain the fact that social life is not random, chaotic, or disconnected but instead demonstrates the existence of an ordered social universe? The second question (illustrated in Figure 1.2) is that of **action**. It considers the factors that motivate individuals or groups to act. The question of action, then, turns our attention to the forces held to be responsible for steering individual or group behavior in a particular direction.

Similar to how the north–south, east–west coordinates allow you to orient yourself to the details on a street map, our analytical map is anchored by four coordinates

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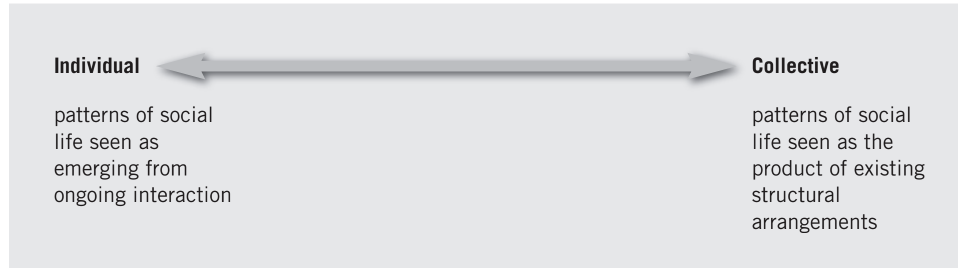
[1]Further complicating the matter is that many of the original works that make up the core of sociological theory were written in a language other than English. Language translation is itself an imperfect exercise.

Figure 1.1 Basic Theoretical Continuum as to the Nature of Social Order



that assist you in navigating the details of the theories presented in this volume. In this case, the coordinates situate the answers to the two questions. Thus, to the question of order, one answer is that the patterns of social life are the product of structural arrangements or historical conditions that confront individuals or groups. As such, preexisting social arrangements produce the apparent orderliness of social life because individuals and groups are pursuing trajectories that, in a sense, are not of their own making. Society is thus pictured as an overarching system that works *down* on individuals and groups to determine the shape of the social order. Society is understood as a reality sui generis that operates according to its own logic distinct from the will of individuals. This orientation has assumed many different names—macro, holistic, objectivist, structuralist, and the label we use here, **collective** (or **collectivist**).

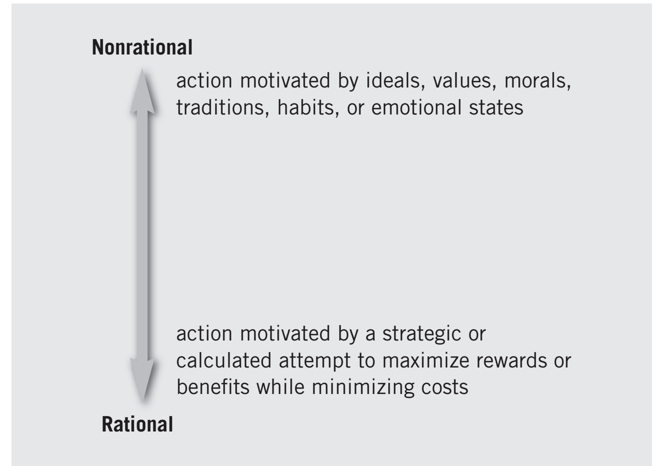
By contrast, the other answer to the question of order is that social order is a product of ongoing interactions between individuals and groups. Here, it is individuals and groups creating, re-creating, or altering the social order that works *up* to produce society. Put in another way, individualist approaches to order highlight **agency**—the individual's capability to act or to intervene in his or her world. This position grants more autonomy to actors, because they are seen as relatively free to reproduce the patterns and routines of social life (i.e., the social order) or transform them. Over time, this orientation has earned several names as well—micro, elementarism, subjectivist, and the label we adopt here, **individual** (or **individualist**). (See Figure 1.1.)

Turning to the question of action, we again find two answers, labeled here as **nonrational** and **rational**.[2] Specifically, if the motivation for action is primarily nonrational, the individual takes his bearings from subjective ideals, symbolic codes, values, morals, norms, traditions, the quest for meaning, unconscious desires, or emotional states, or a combination of these. While the nonrationalist orientation is relatively broad in capturing a number of motivating forces, the rationalist orientation is far less encompassing. It contends that individual and group actions are motivated primarily by the attempt to maximize rewards while minimizing costs. Here, individuals and groups are viewed essentially as calculating and strategic as they seek to achieve the "selfish" goal of improving their positions. Actors are seen

[2] The terms "rational" and "nonrational" are problematic in that they have a commonsensical usage that is at odds with how theorists use these terms. By "rational," we do not mean "good and smart," and by "nonrational," we do not mean "irrational, nonsensical, or stupid" (Alexander 1987:11). Despite these problems, however, we continue to use the terms "rational" and "nonrational" because the semantic alternatives ("subjectivist," "idealist," "internal," etc.) are problematic as well.

as taking their bearings from the external conditions in which they find themselves rather than from internal ideals.

Figure 1.2 Basic Theoretical Continuum as to the Nature of Social Action



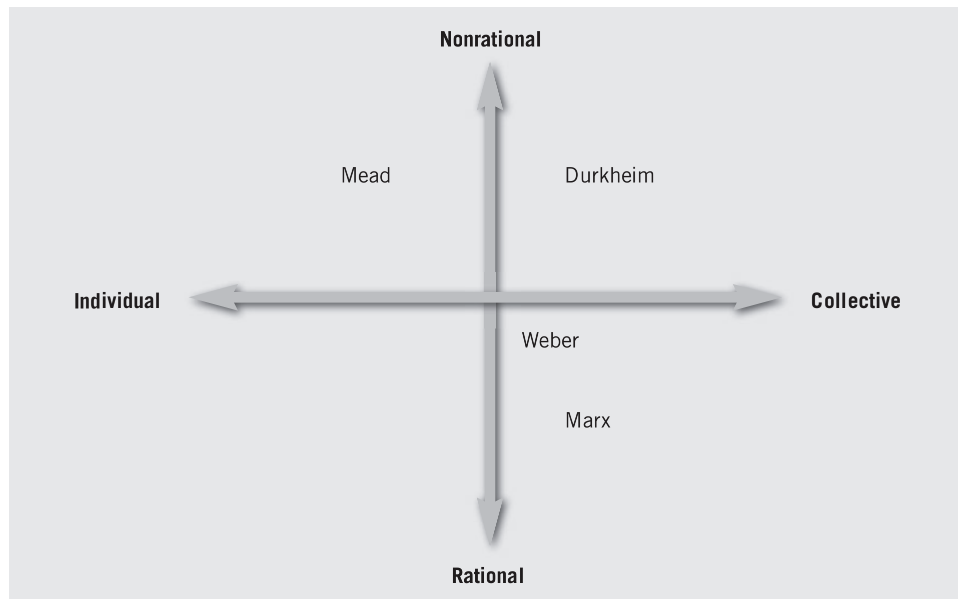
Intersecting the two questions and their answers, we can create a four-celled map on which we are able to plot the basic theoretical orientation of the social thinkers featured in this book. The four cells are identified as collective-nonrational, collective-rational, individual-nonrational, and individual-rational. For instance, as illustrated in Figure 1.3, the German philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883), whose politico-economic critique of capitalism is one of the most influential theories in history, was interested above all in the collectivist and rationalist conditions behind and within order and action, while the French theorist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), especially in his later work, was most interested in the collectivist/nonrationalist realm. Durkheim sought to explain how oftentimes intangible social forces (such as moral codes) organize and order our world. Additionally, the German theorist Max Weber (1864–1920) offered a more multidimensional theory than either Marx or Durkheim by focusing on the *interpenetration* of structural forces (such as the capitalist economy and bureaucracy) and systems of meaning (such as religion). In contrast to Marx, Durkheim and Weber, who take a primarily collectivistic approach, the American social philosopher George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) saw social order as continually emerging through the ongoing activities of individuals (individualistic) as they attempt to make sense of the situations in which they find themselves (nonrationalistic). By highlighting the social basis of thinking and communication, Mead challenged prevailing psychological theories about the mind (see Figure 1.3).

We cannot overemphasize, however, that these four coordinates are "ideal types"; theorists and theories are never "pure," that is, situated completely in one cell. Implicitly or explicitly, or both, theorists inevitably incorporate more than one orientation in their work. These coordinates (or cells in the graph) are best understood as endpoints to a continuum on which theories typically occupy a position somewhere between the extremes. Multidimensionality and ambiguity are reflected in our maps by the lack of fixed points.

In addition, it is important to note that this map is something *you* apply to the theories under consideration. Although each theorist addresses the questions of order and action, the theorists generally did not use these terms in their writing. For that matter, their approaches to order and action tend to be implicit rather than explicit in their work. Thus, at times you will have to read between the lines to determine a theorist's position on these fundamental questions. Although this may pose some challenges, it also expands your opportunities for learning.

Consequently, not everyone views each theorist in exactly the same light. Moreover, even within one major work, a theorist may draw from both ends of the continuum. In each chapter, we discuss the ambiguities and alternative interpretations within the body of work of each theorist. Nevertheless, these maps enable you to (1) recognize the general tendencies that exist within each theorist's body of work and (2) compare and contrast (and argue about) thinkers' general theoretical orientations. (For further

Figure 1.3 Core Classical Theorists' Basic Orientation



Note: This diagram reflects the basic theoretical orientation of a few core classical theorists: George Herbert Mead, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. However, each of these theorists—as well as every theorist in this volume—is far more nuanced and multidimensional than this simple figure lets on. The point is not to fix each theorist in a predetermined box, but rather to provide a means for illuminating and discussing each theorist's orientation relative to one another and within their various works.

examples as to the flexibility of this framework, see the discussion questions at the end of the chapter.)

Put another way, when navigating the forest of theory, individual theorists are like trees. Our analytic map is a tool or device for locating the trees within the forest so that you can enter and leave having developed a better sense of direction or, in this case, having learned far more than might otherwise have been the case. By enabling you to compare theorists' positions on two crucial issues, their work is likely to be seen less as a collection of separate, unrelated ideas. Bear in mind, however, that the map is only a tool. Its simplicity does not capture the complexities of the theories or of social life itself.

In sum, it is essential to remember that this four-cell matrix is an analytical device that helps us understand and compare and contrast theorists better, but it does not mirror or reflect reality. The production and reproduction of the social world is never a function of either individuals or social structures but rather a complex combination of both. So too motivation is never completely rational or completely nonrational. To demonstrate this point, as well as how our analytical map on action and order works in general, we turn to a very simple example.

Consider this question: Why do people stop at red traffic lights? First, in terms of action, the answer to this question resides on a continuum, with rational and nonrational orientations serving as the endpoints. On the one hand, you might say people stop at red traffic lights because it is in their best interest to avoid getting a ticket or having an accident. This answer reflects a *rationalist* response; it demonstrates that rationalist motivations involve the individual taking her bearings from outside herself.

The action (stopping at the red light) proceeds primarily in light of external conditions (e.g., a police officer who could ticket you, oncoming cars that could hit you).

A *nonrationalist* answer to this question is that people stop at red traffic lights because they believe it is good and right to follow the law. Here, the individual takes his bearings from morals or values from within himself, rather than from external conditions (e.g., oncoming cars). Interestingly, if this moral or normative imperative is the only motivation for action, the individual will stop at the traffic light even if there is no police car or oncoming cars in sight. By contrast, if one's only motivation for action is rationalist, and there are absolutely no visible dangers (i.e., no police officers or other cars in sight and hence no possibility of getting a ticket or having an accident), the driver will *not* stop at the red light: instead, she will go.

Another *nonrationalist* answer to the question "Why do people stop at red traffic lights?" involves "habits." By definition, habits are relatively unconscious: that is, we do not think about them. They come "automatically," not from strategic calculations or external circumstances but from within; that is why they are typically considered *nonrational*. Interestingly, habits may or may not have their roots in morality. Some habits are "folkways," or routinized ways people do things in a particular society (e.g., paying your bills by mail rather than in person, driving on the right side of the road), while other habits are attached to sacred values (e.g., putting your hand over your heart when you salute the flag). Getting back to our example, say you are driving in your car on a deserted road at 2:00 in the morning, and you automatically stop at a red traffic light out of habit. Your friend riding with you might say, "Why are you stopping? There's not a car in sight." If your action were motivated simply by habit and not a moral imperative to follow the law, you might say, "Hey, you're right!" and drive through the red light.

Of course, actions often have—indeed, they usually have—both rational *and* nonrational dimensions. For instance, in this previous example, you might have interpreted your friend's question, "Why are you stopping? There's not a car in sight," to mean, "Don't be a goody-goody—let's go!" In other words, you may have succumbed to peer pressure even though you knew it was wrong to do so. If such was the case, you may have wittingly or unwittingly believed your ego, or your sense of self, was on the line. Thus, it was not so much that rational trumped nonrational motivation as it was that you acted out of the external pressure from your friend and internal pressure to do the "cool" thing and be the particular type of person you want to be. If such were the case, your action is a complex combination of conditions both outside and within yourself.

Indeed, a basic premise of this book is that because social life is extremely complex, a complete social theory must account for multiple sources of action and levels of social order. Theorists must be able to account for the wide variety of components (e.g., individual predispositions, personality and emotions, social and symbolic structures) constitutive of this world. Thus, for instance, our rationalist response to the question as to why people stop at red traffic lights—that people stop simply because they don't want to get a ticket or get into an accident—is, in fact, incomplete. It is undercut by a series of unacknowledged nonrational motivations. There is a whole host of information that undergirds the very ability of an individual to make this choice. For example, before one can even begin to make the decision as to whether to stop for the red light, one must know that normally (and legally) "red" *means* "stop" and "green" *means* "go." That we know and take for granted that "red" means "stop" and "green" means "go" and then consciously think about and decide to override that cultural knowledge (and norm) indicates that even at our most rationalist moments, we are still using the tools of a largely taken-for-granted, symbolic, or nonrational realm (see Table 1.1).