CHAPTER 1

The Rise of Theoretical Sociology

He became the toast of Europe in 1830. Twenty years later, this once famous Frenchman was ridiculed and regarded as a fool. He had always been a difficult person; he had been arrogant, rude, and unpleasant. He announced that he would now engage in "cerebral hygiene" and no longer read the works of those whom he felt were his intellectual inferiors. He proclaimed himself to be "the Great Priest of Humanity" and the founder of the new "Universal Religion." His followers were a rather odd and ragtag assortment of workers, third-rate intellectuals, and other hangers-on. He would send messages, like the Pope, to his followers; and in fact, he even sent missives to the Pope himself that, in all likelihood, were ignored. The final volume of his great multivolume work—the same work that had made him famous in Europe in 1830—did not receive a single review in the French press in 1842.

Who was this pathetic figure? He was the titular founder of sociology, Auguste Comte, whose life and works will be examined in Chapters 2 and 3. Perhaps it is somewhat embarrassing to have the founder of sociology be a person who clearly went a bit insane. Yet the early Comte had been brilliant and did much to carve out a niche for a new discipline. He wanted to call this new discipline "social physics" because the term *physics* in his time meant to "study the fundamental nature of phenomena"; and so the new discipline would study the fundamental nature of social phenomena. To Comte's dismay, the label "social physics" had been previously used by a Belgian

statistician, with the result that he constructed the Latin and Greek hybrid: *sociology*. He did not like this name, but he felt that he did not have a choice. Still, the first volume of his *Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830)—the volume that made him famous—was a brilliant analysis of how science had advanced to the point where the social universe could be systematically studied. Sociology could not emerge, he argued, until the other sciences had advanced and until science in general had become widely accepted as a legitimate mode of inquiry. With the pervasiveness of science today, it is perhaps hard to recognize that science had to fight its way into the intellectual arena because it represented a challenge to the dominance of religion. Indeed, early in the growth of science in Europe, even Galileo had to renounce his views and suffer legal persecution for the insight that the earth was not the center of the universe, nor was the earth the center of our solar system. And, even after several hundred years of success—indeed, thousands of years of success if we count the accomplishments of Arab, Persian, Egyptian, and Greek scholarship—science was still not on a secure footing at the beginning of the nineteenth century; and as the controversy over Charles Darwin's theory of biotic evolution documented, science still had to fight for its place as the final arbiter of knowledge about the natural world. In fact, the current controversy in the United States over teaching evolution in schools attests to the simple fact that, when science contradicts intensely felt religious beliefs, the conflict often becomes political—just as it was in the times of Galileo or Darwin.

Thus, what Comte tried to accomplish in the first volume of *Course of Positive Philosophy* was monumental, and perhaps even risky. The great irony is that Comte began to see himself a few decades later as a quasi-religious prophet rather than as a hard-nosed scientist, although a prophet of a more secular religion (perhaps like Scientology or Unitarianism today). In giving the systematic study of social phenomenon a name—albeit a second-choice name—and then it legitimating a science of the social realm, Comte accomplished a great deal. Few read Comte today, but as we will see shortly, his arguments were hugely legitimating for a new discipline that had to fight its way into academia and science more generally.

In one of those cruel ironies of history, Comte became an important figure again in France and the United States at the turn of the twentieth century. Alas, he could not enjoy his new fame from the grave,

but his advocacy for theoretical sociology recaptured the imagination of emerging departments in his native country and in the United States, with the result that his work was once again in vogue. In fact, almost all of the sociology textbooks in the United States published in the early years of the twentieth century had prominent sections devoted to Comte. And so, the "great priest of humanity" thus had one more brush with fame because, and as we will see in the following chapters, his advocacy carried a powerful message of what the new science of sociology could become.

Long before Comte, of course, humans had thought about the universe around them, even the social universe built up from the activities of people adapting to their environments. Indeed, people have always been "folk sociologists," just as most people are today when they make a pronouncement on the causes of some social event, or when they assert what should be done to resolve some problematic social condition. Also, very early on in human history, but accelerating dramatically with the invention of writing, scholars began developing schools and systems of philosophical thought that had many of the elements of sociological analysis. So sociology has existed in one form or another for as long as we have been human, but Comte gave this activity a name and tried—with only partial success—to make it a science like any other natural science. This idea of "a natural science of society"[1] is still controversial in sociology, and we can see the lines of contention in the thinking of the first sociological theorists examined in this book. Some were hard-core scientists—or at least committed to this epistemology. Others were skeptical and, yet, they wanted to study the social world systematically. Thus, the status of sociology as a science was not only questioned in the classical period of theorizing; it is still a contentious issue today.

The emergence of sociology and, hence, sociological theory was inevitable. If Comte had not been born, someone else would have articulated a name for the systematic and even scientific study of the social universe. Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology*[2] might

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[1]This phrase was borrowed from A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's 1937 series of lectures at the University of Chicago that were published after his death the book, *A Natural Science of Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

[2]Herbert Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1873) made a strong case for viewing sociology as an explanatory science that could overcome human biases and develop laws explaining the dynamics of human social organization.

have become the new manifesto for the discipline, but sociology's official arrival might have been delayed for decades. The emergence of sociology was the culmination of not only a very long history of humans thinking about their creations—the social world—but of broader social and intellectual movements that began to bring Europe out of its "Dark Ages" after the collapse of the Roman Empire. This Renaissance also included new ways of thinking, which collectively are sometimes termed *the Enlightenment.* Once these new ways of thinking began to gain traction, it was inevitable that someone like Comte would come along to give a name to new ways of thinking about the social world. We should, therefore, briefly pause to see what the Enlightenment accomplished and why it set the stage for sociology to make its grand entrance before an often skeptical audience.

The Enlightenment and New Ways of Thinking

The Intellectual Revolution

When the Roman Empire finally collapsed, there followed a period often termed *the Dark Ages.* Much of the learning of Romans and, more important, of Greeks, Arabs, Persians, and Egyptians was lost; and only the faithful scribes of medieval monasteries kept the Eastern and Western intellectual traditions alive. The label, the Enlightenment, is obviously meant to connote a lighting of the dark, but in fact, the Dark Ages were not stagnant[3]; after the initial decline in Western civilization when the Roman Empire finally collapsed, living conditions for most people were miserable; and yet new inventions and new ideas were slowly accumulating, despite the oppressive poverty of the masses, the constant warfare among feudal lords, and the rigid dogma of religion. New forms and experiments in commerce, politics, economics, religion, art, music, crafts, *and* thinking were slowly emerging. As these elements of "the great awakening" were accumulating between the fifth and thirteenth centuries, a critical threshold was finally reached. Change came more rapidly as these innovations

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[3]There is often a tendency to think that the Dark Ages were stagnant, but societies were slowly being rebuilt after the collapse of the Roman Empire. See Patrick Nolan and Gerhard Lenski, *Human Societies* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Press, 2009) for a review of the changes that were occurring; these would eventually drive societies toward modernity.

fed off each other. As social structure and culture changed, so did human thinking about the world. Much of what had been lost from the Greeks and Romans, as well as from the early civilizations of the Middle East, was found (in dusty church libraries), rediscovered, and often improved on. Nowhere is this more evident than in how scholars viewed science as a way of understanding the universe.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626) was the first to articulate clearly the new mode of inquiry: Conceptualizations of the nature of the universe should always be viewed with skepticism and tested against observable facts. This sounds like scientific common sense today, but it was a radical idea at the time. This mode of inquiry stimulated great achievements in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century astronomy, including Isaac Newton's famous law of gravity. Thinking about the universe was now becoming systematic, but equally important, it was becoming abstract and yet empirical. The goal was to articulate fundamental relationships in the universe that could explain the many varied ways that these relationships can be expressed in the empirical world. To explain events thus required systematic and abstract thinking—in a word, it required theory. And this way of thinking literally transformed the world.

The Enlightenment was thus an intellectual revolution because it changed how we are to explain the universe, and increasingly, it held out the vision that knowledge about how the universe operates can also be used to better the human condition. In fact, progress was not only possible but inevitable once science and rational thinking dominate how to explain the world, including the social world of our own creation. In England and Scotland, the Enlightenment was dominated by a group of thinkers who sought to justify the industrial capitalism that first appeared in the British Isles. Scholars like Adam Smith believed that individuals should be free of external constraint and should be free to compete, thereby creating a better society. While this might be considered a conservative philosophy today, it was liberal if not radical in its time. In France, the Enlightenment was dominated by a group of scholars known as the *philosophes.* Despite the fact that Adam Smith formulated one of the essential questions of sociology—how are increasingly specialized people working and living in different worlds to become integrated into a complex but coherent society?—it is the philosophes who had more influence on the emergence of sociology, although we should always remember that one of the most important thinkers of the nineteenth

century—Karl Marx—saw himself as trying to improve on Adam Smith's economic theory. Sociology thus has it major roots in the intellectual ferment generated by French philosophers, but we must always remember that thinkers in the Anglo world also influenced the development of the new science of sociology.

The new thinking that drove the Enlightenment derived considerable inspiration from the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Newtonian physics is perhaps the symbolic peak of the Enlightenment because it broke what had been a philosophical dualism between the senses and reason. Reason and the world of phenomena *are not separate* but all part of a new way of knowing. Through concepts, speculation, and logic, the facts of the empirical world can be understood; and by accumulating facts, reason could sort through them and provide explanations for their existence and operation that were more than flights of intellectual fancy or impositions of religious dogma.

The world was no longer the province of the supernatural; it was the domain of the natural, and its complexity could now be understood by the combination of reason and facts. Newton's law of gravity was hailed as the exemplar of how scientific inquiry should be conducted. And gradually, the social universe was included in domains that science should explain. This gradual inclusion was a radical break from the past where the social had been considered the domain of morals, ethics, and religion. The goal of the French philosophes, then, was to emancipate social thought from religious speculation; and while the philosophe*s* were hardly very scientific, they performed the essential function of placing thought about the human condition in the realm of reason. As can be seen in the philosophes statements about universal human rights, law, and natural order (ideas that are at the core of the U.S. Constitution), their work was seen as a radical attack on established authority in both the state and church. From notions of natural laws, it is but a short step to thinking about the fundamental laws not only of human rights but also of human social organization. As will be evident in the next chapter, many of the less shrill and polemical philosophes—first Charles Montesquieu, then Jacques Turgot, and finally Jean Condorcet—actually made this short step and sought to understand the social realm through principles or laws that they felt were the equivalent to those developed by Newton for the physical realm.

Social conditions almost always affect how scholars think about the world, and such was the case for the philosophes who were opposed to the Old Regime (monarchy) in France and who were supportive of the bourgeoisie in emphasizing free trade, free labor, free commerce, free industry, and free opinion. The growing and literate bourgeoisie formed the reading public that bought the books, papers, and pamphlets of the philosophes. These works are filled with seeming "laws" of the human condition but these were ideological statements derived from moral, political, and social philosophies; they were not reasoned laws of the social universe. Yet they contained support and indeed heralded the view that a science of society molded in the image of physics or biology was not only possible but an inevitable outcome of human progress.

The basic thesis of all the philosophes—whether Voltaire, Rousseau, Condorcet, Diderot, or others—was that humans had certain "natural rights," which were violated by the institutional arrangements of the time. It was, therefore, necessary to dismantle the existing social order and substitute a new order that would be more compatible with the rights and needs of humans. This transformation was to occur through reasoned and progressive legislation. And again, one of the cruel ironies of history forced the philosophes to watch in horror as their names and ideas were used to justify the violent aftermath of the French Revolution of 1789—hardly the "reconstruction" of the social order that they had in mind.

In almost all of the philosophes' formulations was a vision of human progress. Humanity was seen to be marching in a direction governed by the law of progress that was as fundamental as the law of gravitation in the physical world. Thus, the philosophes were clearly unscientific in their moral advocacy, but they offered at least the rhetoric of post-Newtonian science in their search for the natural laws of the human order and in their formulation of the law of progress. These somewhat contradictory intellectual tendencies were to be merged together in Comte's advocacy for scientific sociology.

Comte did not have to reconcile these tendencies alone because the most talented of the philosophes, scholars such as Montesquieu, Turgot, and Condorcet, provided the broad contours of reconciliation to Comte: The laws of human organization, particularly the law of progressive development, can be used as tools to create a better social world. With this mixture of concerns—morality, progress, and scientific laws—this new view of possibilities was carried into the

nineteenth century. From this intellectual legacy, the young Comte was to pull diverse and often contradictory elements to forge a forceful statement about the nature of a science of society, as is explored in the next two chapters.

New systems of thought do not appear only from heady intellectual debates; new ideas almost always reflect more fundamental transformations in the organization of polity and production. Yet, once created, ideas have the capacity to stimulate new forms of politics and new modes of production. The Enlightenment was thus more than an intellectual revolution; its emergence was a response to changes in patterns of social organization generated by new political and economic formations.

The Political and Economic Revolutions

For most of the eighteenth century, the last remnants of the old economic order were crumbling under the impact of the commercial and industrial revolutions. The expansion of free markets and trade eliminated much of the feudal order during the seventeenth century, but during the eighteenth century new restrictions were imposed by guilds controlling labors' access to skilled occupations and by chartered (by the nobility) corporations controlling vast sectors of economic production. The cotton industry was the first to break the hold of the guilds and chartered corporations, and with each subsequent decade, other industries were subject to the liberating effects of free labor, free trade, and free production. By the time that larger scale industrial production emerged—first in England, then in France, and later in Germany—the underlying economic reorganization had already been achieved. The new industrial base of manufacturing simply accelerated in the nineteenth century the transformations that had been at work for decades in the eighteenth century.

These transformations were profound: labor was liberated from the land; wealth and capital existed independently of the large noble estates; urbanization of the population was depopulating rural areas; competitive industries generated ever-new technologies to stay a step ahead of competitors; markets expanded to distribute finished goods produced by industry and to provide basic resources needed for manufacturing; services increasingly became an important part of the economy; law became concerned

with regularizing new economic processes, trade, and privilege for new and often old elites; polity could no longer legitimate its leaders by "divine rights"; and religion was losing much of its influence in general but particularly in its capacity to legitimate polity. As these transformations methodically destroyed the old feudal order as well as the transitional mercantile order of guilds and chartered corporations, the daily lives of people also changed. Family structures began to shrink; new classes such as the urban proletariat and bourgeoisie expanded; people increasingly sold their labor as a commodity in markets; and many other former routines were changed. These changes coupled with memories of the disorder caused by revolution provided the first French sociologists with their basic intellectual problem: How to use the laws of social organization to create a new, less volatile, and more humane social order?

By the time of the French Revolution, the old feudal system was a mere skeleton of its former self. Peasants had become landowners, although tenant farming was still practiced but subject to high rates of taxation. The landed aristocracy had lost much of its wealth through indolence, incompetence, and unwillingness to pursue occupations in the emerging capitalist order. In fact, many of the nobility lived in genteel poverty within the walls of their disintegrating estates, only to have their land purchased by the bourgeoisie or to seek out the bourgeoisie for loans and marital partners for noble but poor children. The monarchy was "diluted" or "polluted" by the selling of titles to the bourgeoisie and by the need to seek loans from those who had money. And so, by the time of the revolution, the monarchy was weak and in fiscal crisis, increasingly depending on the bourgeoisie for support.

The structure of the state perhaps best reflects these changes. By the end of the eighteenth century, the French monarchy had become almost functionless. It had a centralized governmental system but the monarchs were now lazy, indolent, and incompetent. The real power resided in the professional administrators in the state bureaucracy, most of whom had been recruited from the bourgeoisie. The various magistrates were also recruited from the bourgeoisie, and the independent financiers, particularly the Farmers General, had assumed many of the tax-collecting functions of government. In exchange for a fixed sum of money, the monarch had contracted to the financiers the right to collect taxes, with the result that financiers collected all that they could and, in the process, generated

enormous resentment and hostility in the population. With their excessive profits, the financiers became the major bankers of the monarchy: the king, nobility, church, guild masters, merchants, and monopolistic corporate manufacturers often went to them for loans—thus increasing the abuse of their power. Thus, when the revolution came, it confronted a governmental system that had been in severe decline for a century, and yet, the violence of the revolution and the decades of instability in France that followed document that bourgeoisie's assumption of power had been incomplete. True, the bureaucracies of the state filled with bourgeoisie functionaries kept the body of the state functioning but often without a head. The ferment of ideas before and after the revolution only underscores a basic truth: Change and especially dramatic change leads individuals to search for answers about "what to do."

In England, the changes were more evolutionary, with the result that sociology did not first emerge in the British Isles. The equivalent of the philosophes in the British Isles also thought about the nature of humans and their basic needs and rights, but they did so in a rather understated, almost passionless manner. The fire was in France because the abuses were greater and the transformation more revolutionary, leading people to think about how to reconstruct society. France was ready for sociology, and once it appeared, thinkers in the British Isles and Germany would find it an appealing way of dealing with the more evolutionary changes in their societies. Sociology was now ready to begin its long climb toward respectability, a journey that took 100 years to achieve at even a modest level of success.

Early Sociological Theory, 1830–1930

In the pages to follow, we will examine the most important theories developed in sociology's first 100 years. This is, of course, a rather arbitrary framing of the "classical" canon in sociology because, as we will see when examining the thinking of those who influenced the classical thinkers, we could easily push the date back for sociology's emergence by another 100 years, but Comte's naming of the discipline and advocacy give us a clear starting point, even if it is somewhat arbitrary. The end point is also a bit arbitrary, but the third decade into the twentieth century is an appropriate end point for the "classical period." First, all of the key figures in this classical

period had died. Second, the next 20 years produced surprisingly few new general theoretical approaches like those of the early masters. It was, rather, a period of developing methodologies for studying social life more than an effort to explain the dynamics of social life with theories. It was not until the 1950s that theories revealing the same level of explanatory power of the first masters began to reappear. We could consider the 1950s as the beginning of contemporary theory, although at some point in the very near future, we may need to find a new label for ideas that are now many decades old.

The early masters struggled with the problem of what theory is, and in fact, sociologists still struggle with this issue—as noted earlier. In science, theory is a particular way of explaining how and why events occur, and many thinkers in scientific sociological theory try to produce explanations that are consistent with the epistemology of science. Still others are not so sure about whether or not sociology can be, or even should be, a science; and their doubts are also reflected in the works of the early masters. Thus, theory has meant something different to sociologists from the very beginnings of the discipline labeled sociology. So we can ask, "What makes all of their early masters' work *theoretical*, even if many of its central figures were not dedicated to the epistemology of science?"

One element of the answer to this question is that all of the classical theorists sought to develop *abstract concepts* to denote critical properties of the social universe. Even when describing empirical events during the development of modern societies, they did more than describe. They abstracted above the flow of empirical events and sought to understand the underlying forces driving these empirical events. For example, the forces of capitalism were to be explained by more generic forces of production and distribution. Or, in politics, concepts would be developed about power in general and how power operates in the social world. Even scholars like Max Weber, who did not believe that there are universal properties of the social world like those in the biophysical universe, still developed very general concepts to denote the dynamics of power in many different types of societies.

Another element of what makes the early masters' work theoretical is that their *analysis is systematic*. It seeks to explain the connections among social forces, and how these connections generate, reproduce, or change the social world. Power, production, distribution, sacredness and piety, communities, classes, and other social phenomena are *all*

connected to each other. And, it is important to understand these effects in explanations of events in the social world. For example, political actors are influenced by economic actors, and vice versa; politics is greatly influenced by the structure of the class system or by religion; classes are generated by the distribution of resources by organizational units in economy, polity, community, and other social structures; or, all social structures are constrained by culture, and vice versa. Thus, regardless of where one of the classical figures stood on the prospects for scientific theory, they all were dedicated to discovering the most fundamental and important interconnections among social phenomena. Without this kind of knowledge, understanding how the social operates is not possible.

Still another common element in the theories of the early masters was the *concern with modernity* or the transformations of social life that came with industrialization, urbanization, nation-state formation, alternations in the class system, spread of bureaucracies, changes in values and beliefs, science and technology, and many other features of the modern world. Indeed, as we emphasized earlier, it is these kinds of transformative events acting in concert and having causal effects on each other that makes people in general, and scholars interested in explaining these events in particular, seek to develop concepts that can denote the key properties and their causal interconnections and that can explain the dramatic changes that come with modernity. Why did modernity emerge in the first place? What events led to the decline of feudal social forms and the rise of capitalistic forms? What are the underlying properties of modernity—for example, markets, rationality, new cultural beliefs, science, democratic polities, and so on? Answers to these questions would, in turn, allow for understanding of not only why the modern world emerged but also how it operates. And, in trying to understand modernity, early sociologists were often led to early societal formations in an effort to understand what properties of premodern social formations would be conductive to modernization.

Another element is not so obvious, but all of the early theorists in sociology had some implicit notion of *societal evolution* even if, like Max Weber, they explicitly rejected this notion. Comte, Spencer, Marx, Weber, Émile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, and even the philosopher George Herbert Mead all had a view of the world as successively transforming. Some emphasized growth and social differentiation (Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Mead, and perhaps even Simmel); others

emphasized conflicts (Spencer, Marx, and Weber); still others the process of what Weber termed *rationalization* (or the emphasis on rational calculations in ever more social spheres). Some saw evolution as a series of discrete stages (Comte, Spencer, Marx, and Durkheim) or cycles (Spencer) operating inside the increasing differentiation of the social universe. Evolution was an important mode of thinking in the nineteenth century, especially in biology, and many sociologists borrowed this idea explicitly from biology (especially Comte, Spencer, and Durkheim), but they used it to analyze the directional nature of evolution toward more complexity because they could see this trend in their own immediate worlds.

Yet one more element is evident among the early theorists: *debate and dialogue.* For the most part, they responded to each other, sometimes openly but equally often obliquely. For example, Spencer responded to Comte, as did Durkheim; Durkheim was critical of Spencer even as he adopted many of his ideas; Weber was quietly proposing an alternative to Marx's scheme of class and social change; Simmel was critical of Marx without ever really mentioning him by name in his analysis of money; Durkheim implicitly criticized Marx in his analysis of the "forced division of labor." Thus, to varying degrees most of the early theorists were responding to each other, often borrowing but more often criticizing other theorists' key concepts and explanations. One feature of science, and all forms of intellectual competition, is to provide the best explanation of events; and all of the early masters were trying to do so, even with their varying interests and modes of explanation. They all sought attention space[4] by emphasizing the power of their ideas and, at the same time, the weaknesses in their competitors' ideas.

Thus, even though some of the early theorists did not consider themselves to be "hard scientists," they were all theoretical. They were more interested in explaining than describing social reality. And their concepts were abstract and general. Their analyses were systematic and sought to sort out causal connections among phenomena. They all focused on the changes associated with modernity, even the philosopher George Herbert Mead. They all had at least an implicit and, in most cases, an explicit model of social evolution, albeit being

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[4]Randall Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

driven by somewhat different dynamics. And they were often in a quiet debate and dialogue with each other (even if the other had died) to develop the better explanation.

The First Masters

Not all of the early masters considered themselves to be sociologists. Karl Marx did not see himself as a sociologist, and in his mind, he was trying to improve on Adam Smith's analysis of capitalism, while being a revolutionary critic of capitalism and what it had wrought on people. It is sociology that adopted Marx rather than the reverse. George Herbert Mead was a philosopher but he too was adopted by students of sociology at his university and, later, by the whole field. And, while Mead is still mentioned in the history of philosophy, he is still very much "alive" in sociology. Comte was, of course, a sociologist, if only by definition. Spencer was a general philosopher, and he subsumed his work in sociology under the general label *Synthetic Philosophy*, but his sociological works written as part of this general philosophy are nonetheless labeled as sociology. Max Weber and Georg Simmel were both self-conscious sociologists and, together, founded the German Sociological Association. Durkheim was, like Comte 60 years before him, an advocate of sociology and held the first sociology chair in France.

There has been a trend in recent decades to include other figures in the pantheon of "early masters" or "classical theorists." Most of these figures were not sociologists but prominent scholars, intellectuals, social activists, and journalists of their time; they were *not* theorists, and their work has had relatively little influence on much of contemporary sociological theory. Their works had sociological implications, and in the case of some, these works were very good sociology. This effort to rewrite sociology's history is understandable because of general efforts today to be inclusive, but the reality is that women and most minorities were excluded from academia by formal and informal discrimination. Without an academic base, it is particularly difficult to do academic work—although some like Simmel managed to build an academic career without being employed in a university, until near end of his life. Or, Spencer was sufficiently wealthy to be able to pursue his interests outside academia, or Marx who was not

wealthy but he had a wealthy patron who supported his work outside of academia. Comte soon lost his academic anchorage and indeed all anchorage as his life digressed into delusional ramblings. Yet we cannot remake, except by fiat, these talented persons into theorists—despite the understandable desire to do so by many commentators. Some were more sociological than others but none were theorists in the same mold as the early masters.

We have not included a few scholars who did make theoretical contributions—scholars like Vilfredo Pareto, whose work is one of the cornerstones of modern neoclassical economics; William Graham Sumner who brought Comte and the concern for science well into the twentieth century; Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and other thinkers who became known as The Chicago School (in the first department of sociology in the world at the University of Chicago); W. E. B. Dubois who was an excellent sociologist and who made some contributions to theories of racial and ethnic dynamics but not to general theories of larger domains of social phenomena; Lester Frank Ward who was the only trained scientist among the first generation of American sociologists; and a number of others. They are not included because we want to stick with the core of the classical tradition that *still informs and guides* sociological theorizing. Some like Pareto should be consulted more; others like Comte and Spencer are not read much anymore are still included because Comte is a key historical figure and Spencer's ideas still inform sociology, although most sociologists remain unaware of Spencer's influence because it is mediated through other prominent figures, beginning with Durkheim but extending through Talcott Parsons and many others in the modern era of sociological theorizing. There is, perhaps, a certain arbitrariness as to who and what we have included and excluded, but there are still implicit objective criteria that we have used. First, were these scholars theorists? Second, did they have an impact on the development of sociology and, especially, sociological theorizing? And, do they still inform sociological theorizing to a high degree? If the answer is "yes" to these questions, then they have been included; and by these criteria, the list of sociology of the first great theoretical masters is short, as might be expected in a new discipline having to legitimate itself and find intellectual niches in conservative academia where discrimination and exclusion by gender, ethnicity, and religion were common.

Conclusion

The theorists explored in the next chapters still have a large impact on contemporary theorizing in sociology, as we will briefly outline in the last chapter on the continuing legacy of the first masters in various theoretical perspectives. These first masters discovered some of the fundamental properties and dynamics of the social universe, and so it should not be surprising that such fundamental insights are part of the modern-day canon in sociology. In some ways, however, their influence may even be too strong. Sociologists often stand in the shadows[5] of these masters rather on their shoulders, with the result that they cannot see the horizon beyond the masters. Whether as science or any body of accumulating knowledge, it is critical to add to the knowledge base; and there is often a fine line between respect of the first masters of a discipline and idolatry, where old texts are read again and again in a highly ritualized manner. These readers do not seek new knowledge, but instead, they seek to express their reverence for now deified scholars—in a manner reminiscent of religious study of the sacred texts. In intellectual activity, and especially science, it is important to expand on insights of the early masters, whether scholars like Newton, Darwin, or Durkheim, then move on and develop ever more powerful explanations of how the universe works. The early theorists of sociology's first 100 years provided a solid beginning and base of insights, which have been expanded considerably over the past 80-plus years. But has sociology reached far enough beyond the masters?

A strong case can be made for opposite answers to this question. At times, it seems that sociology is stuck with repeating the insights of the first theorists; and yet, since 1950 in particular, sociology has dramatically expanded its knowledge base, although this expansion is difficult to see because of overspecialization in the discipline. Not only is research highly specialized, but so are theories that deal

[5]Sir Isaac Newton famously remarked in a letter to his rival Robert Hooke dated February 5, 1676 that "*What Descartes did was a good step. You have added much several ways, and especially in taking the colours of thin plates into philosophical consideration. If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants.*" The basic metaphor is that by building on the theoretical and empirical base created by others, a theorist sees farther and expands the base of knowledge. To "stand in the shadows" emphasizes that one worships the masters rather than stand on their base of knowledge and expand this base.

with one or two processes in the social universe but never the whole universe or even large portions of this universe. Disciplines often accumulate knowledge as specialists dig deep but never very wide, but at some point, these bodies of specialized knowledge must be integrated.

We suspect that much of the continued fascination with the first masters stems from the fact that they thought "big" and tried to explain large portions of the social universe. They were concerned with how and why the social world was changing in such dramatic ways, and to address this issue, they thought big by searching for the basic social processes driving the social universe. Reading and rereading of their texts meets a need among contemporary sociologists to visualize the social universe as a whole and to expand theorizing beyond the narrow confines of specific research traditions. Yet, ironically, the result is that contemporary theories that try to be more general often stand too close to the masters, secure in their shadow but not seeing as far as they could, or should.

Yet let us hold final judgment to the end when we examine how the theorists of the first 100 years continue to influence theorizing in the second 100 years. What motivates contemporary general theorists is the same impulse that motivated the masters: How do we understand the rapid transformations of society? Their insights are still relevant because they discovered many of the forces that are fundamental to all patterns of social organization. That is why sociologists continue to write and students continue to read textbooks on their achievements.