



Social Action Systems: Foundation and Synthesis in Sociological Theory

Thomas J. Fararo

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Fararo studies general theoretical sociology as a time-extended tradition with three phases: classical, postclassical, and recent. Employing a process philosophical approach, the author seeks to examine these three phases in an effort to provide a synthesis of the theories that seek to lay the foundations of theoretical sociology. The author especially focuses on the work of Talcott Parsons and George Homans, two contemporary theorists whose common aspiration was to forge a theoretical foundation for sociology that would serve to unify and integrate all theories growing out of sociological research in much the same way that the theory of evolution guides and integrates all other biological theories.

To begin, the author provides a history and overview of the key classical theoretical frameworks from the perspective of process philosophy, which he applies to all three phases of the study. Fararo then carefully analyzes two major postclassical bodies of general theory, namely the evolving and intertwined frameworks of Parsons and Homans from their early theories of social systems to their later divergent perspectives on foundation and synthesis in sociological theory. Finally, the discussion turns to the recent phase of general theoretical sociology, where more recent foundation strategies -- rational choice theory and generative structuralism -- are analyzed in relation to the postclassical phase of the tradition. This important and sophisticated new work is essential for all those interested in sociological theory in particular and sociology in general.

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