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**Review of *Sociological Theory: From the 1950s to the Present*.
Richard Munch. Reviewed by Michael D. Frimes, Louisiana State
University.**

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Book Reviews

Richard Munch, *Sociological Theory: From the 1850s to the Present*. Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall, 1994. \$51.95 hardcover.

This book organizes, presents, and interprets the perspectives of major sociological theorists from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present. The author begins with two claims. First, that most contemporary theory texts are narrowly-bound by the national origins of their authors and thus fail to adequately reflect the growing international character of sociological theory building. Second, that it is impossible to understand contemporary sociological theories without broad knowledge of classical perspectives. The author seeks to address and correct these shortcomings.

The author shares with a growing number of other contemporary analysts of sociological theories the belief that the best way to understand the growth and development of sociological theories is to group them into "broader current[s] of thought with common frame[s] of reference, common basic concepts, ideas, and premises." (p. 4) He labels these "paradigms" and argues that the development of sociological theory is an "ongoing discourse between different competing paradigms and theories" (p. 4), as each spans out into areas where it interrelates and overlaps with others. The author views this "interweaving" of different perspectives as a key requirement for the advancement of theoretical knowledge.

While sharing with other contemporary analysts an essentially "metatheoretical" approach to understanding the theory development process, Professor Munch's own framework for organizing theories into broader groups is unique. In his ambitious attempt to "reconstruct" sociological discourse, the author posits a framework composed of four fields, each with a corresponding view of the world: adaptation (the economics of social action); goal attainment (the conflict paradigm, which deals with the politics of social action); integration (the normative paradigm, which deals with the structure of social action); and latent pattern maintenance (the symbolic paradigm, which deals with the symbolics of social action). The author organizes these fields into an "action space" within which discourse on sociological theory is conceived

of as a "game" with different players (the different paradigms), different instruments (theoretical concepts and statements), different strategies (home players, area players, cross-area players, and world players), and different levels (national, international, periodic universal, and timeless universal).

The author divides his study into three major time-periods, each of which represents a distinct period in the evolution of sociological thought: "the foundation period" that extends from the 1850s to the 1920s; "consolidation and differentiation" from the 1920s to the 1960s; and "renewal and intermeshing" since the 1960s. For each of these periods, he stresses the different roles that the various players, instruments, strategies, and levels of theorizing have played and the resulting consequences for theoretical development in the discipline.

With this conceptual framework established, the remainder of the book discusses the perspective of key theorists in the discipline's history. For each of these the author first details the perspective of the theorist. He then summarizes the theorist's perspective in a number of short statements. Then, he critically appraises the theorist's perspective and occasionally concludes with a discussion of further developments in the theorist's work.

The final chapter in the book offers a summary of the contents of the book that refocuses particular attention to the four levels in his model (the national, the international, the periodic universal, and the timeless universal, and on his claim that, throughout its history, theorizing within the discipline has increasingly moved beyond the boundaries of the nation within which the theorist constructed his/her perspective and toward the timeless universal level. This highest level of theorizing is characterized as "an accumulation of ever more finely woven overlapping theory nets within and across national periodic, and paradigmatic boundaries" (p.16).

This book has a number of strengths. First, it is an ambitious effort to lend coherence to the growing diversity within sociological theorizing. In particular, the author's use of the "games" analogy and the different "ingredients" of theories (i.e., players, instruments, strategies, and levels) to describe the process through which sociological theory develops over time is both interesting and insightful. Second, its breadth of coverage is extensive both

in terms of the time-period covered and the number of theorists whose work is presented. No other text incorporates so much material. Third, the author's presentation of the perspectives of these theorists is both concise and clear. The fact that he includes a summary of each theorist's perspective in short, simple statements should prove particularly attractive to both instructors and students. Finally, the author also provides a number of useful diagrammatic summaries of theories, paradigms, and their interrelationships.

The book also has its weaknesses. First, it is disappointing that the author devotes so little attention to detailing the rationale for the structure of his conceptual framework (its overlap with Parsons' four-functions paradigm is obvious). Despite the fact that he references other publications in which he does lay out his framework in greater detail, the absence of such detail in this volume clearly limits its utility as a teaching tool. This shortcoming also raises the question of whether the conceptual framework is too abstract for many undergraduate students to comprehend. Second, this problem is exacerbated by the fact that reference to the book's conceptual framework is not always present or adequate in the chapters devoted to the various theorists. Placing particular theories (and theorists) within the context of the conceptual framework inside the chapters devoted to them would provide the reader with more material with which to assess the utility of Munch's perspective. Third, the fact that the author includes so many theorists means that the amount of attention he devotes to each must be limited. Here, it is obvious that some sacrifice of depth of treatment for breadth of coverage was made.

Despite these weaknesses, the book makes an important contribution to the efforts of the discipline to understand the structure and dynamics of its theoretical underpinnings. No doubt, it will become a major resource for teachers, students, and practitioners within sociology. It should also be of interest to other social scientists.

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