Part One
Theory and Practice

In contemporary sociology's self-conception, three figures play an especially important foundational or canonical role: Karl Marx (1818–1883), Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), and Max Weber (1864–1920). In the beginning, toward the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, these three figures were not recognized as founders. The idea of founding figures came much later, after World War II, based on the two dense volumes of *The Structure of Social Action* (1937). They were written by Talcott Parsons, the towering Harvard academic who sought to consolidate sociology around four historic figures – Durkheim, Weber, Marshall, and Pareto. In Parsons' original view they independently converged on a "voluntaristic" theory of social action and a consensual view of society. In his 1949 Presidential address to the American Sociological Association, Parsons (1950) leaves Marshall and Pareto behind to give pride of place to Durkheim and Weber. In the turbulent 1960s, and against Parsons' protests, Karl Marx was added to the pantheon.

Marx was an independent thinker outside the academic world, engaged in politics as well as with political economists and philosophers of the nineteenth century. Durkheim was more centrally placed in the academic world, fighting for a place for the newly created discipline of sociology, especially against psychology. Weber was

also deeply involved in university life in Germany and fought for sociology as a new approach to social science from his professorship in political economy.

They each carved out a vision of sociology resting on a set of philosophical assumptions about its object – society or the social. They each proposed a methodology for studying society, often rooted in a broad vision of history, leading to exemplary empirical research that has inspired legions of scholars to follow in their path. But, most important, their theories were rooted in a set of values – freedom, equality, solidarity – that guided what we might call a normative or moral science. Each scientific program wrestles with the question of how those values might be realized – that is the utopian side – and how their realization is obstructed – that is the anti-utopian side. These questions drove a theory of society's permanence and continuity as well as a theory of history, of the future and, thus, of social change. These are the attributes that make Marx, Weber, and Durkheim canonical, necessary attributes for a body of scholarship to enter the pantheon of sociology.

The rare breadth, depth, and vision of canonical figures derive from the battles they fought to have their theories accepted. They had to engage with and borrow from, but also distinguish themselves from, neighboring fields of thought. Once the discipline of sociology was established, those pressures subsided, specialization took off, and the founders could be shed. They were the ladders that got us to the roof; once on the roof, the ladders could be cast aside. But it turns out that the ladders were pillars, too, and without them the roof began to sag. Losing touch with its founders weakens the distinctiveness of sociology as a moral science; it loses sight of itself as a historical actor; it abandons its soul.

If the first chapter of Part One concerns the theoretical foundations of our discipline, the second concerns the practical development of an internal division of labor. As it competed for a place in the academic field, so it advanced

as *a professional knowledge* made up of scientific research programs intended for fellow sociologists who together control entry into the discipline. It, therefore, developed its own disciplinary institutions – academic journals, professional association, textbooks, defining problems with paradigmatic research exemplars, university curricula, and examinations. Professional knowledge justified itself not simply as an esoteric knowledge, but also one capable of addressing social problems, what we can call *policy knowledge*, offering its service to clients: corporations, governments, schools, churches. As policy knowledge sold itself to specific clients, so there developed a *public knowledge* that cultivated discussion and debate in the public sphere about the general direction of society and the values that underpin it. Finally, like any other discipline, professional sociology became an arena of contestation. The established research programs come to be challenged by rising generations, who developed *critical knowledge* that calls into question the fundamental assumptions of consecrated professional knowledge. These distinctions, of course, can inform the development of the division of knowledge-practices within any discipline, but here I confine myself to sociology.

Marx, Weber, and Durkheim offer much in the way of guidance and inspiration and their theories have continuing relevance to the problems we face today, but here I want to stress the way they remind us that a flourishing sociology depends upon all four types of knowledge. With specialization, the different knowledges fly apart, lose touch with one another, and the discipline loses its impetus. As professional and policy knowledge come to dominate and even expel critical and public knowledge, sociology suffers a double amnesia. Individually we lose sight of the original motivation to become sociologists and collectively we lose sight of the values that inspired sociology's origins. As the policy moment finds the going tough in a hostile environment, all that remains is professional sociology, which itself then fragments into multiple

disconnected research projects. The conceptualization of public sociology seeks to restore the contradictory unity of all four sociologies, recognizing that they sit uneasily together in relations of antagonistic interdependence. Only in this way can we return to the utopian and anti-utopian project that lies at the foundation of our discipline. This is especially important today when the original diagnoses of modernity – anomie, rationalization, alienation, domination, inequality – are coming home to roost, and when utopian thinking is losing credibility. Public sociology inspires the renewal of our discipline.

The entry of W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963) into the sociological canon is especially important not only because he centered race in his analysis, not only because he had a global and historical vision, not only because he embarked from lived experience, not only because he was acutely aware of his own place in the world he studied, but also because he uniquely represented all four types of sociology. He circulated restlessly between academic and public worlds, and though he made great contributions to professional knowledge, he never lost sight of the critical sociology that drove it. His research led him to policy advocacy and an array of public interventions that made him unique among sociologists of the twentieth century. He was the greatest public sociologist of the twentieth century. Of all the sociologists, Du Bois was the most sensitive to the antagonistic interdependence among professional, policy, public, and critical sociologies, themselves suspended between utopian imagination and anti-utopian science. He becomes, therefore, the inspiration for a renewal of sociology that is in danger of losing its bearings in the welter of neoliberalism and the centrifugal forces at work within the division of disciplinary labor.