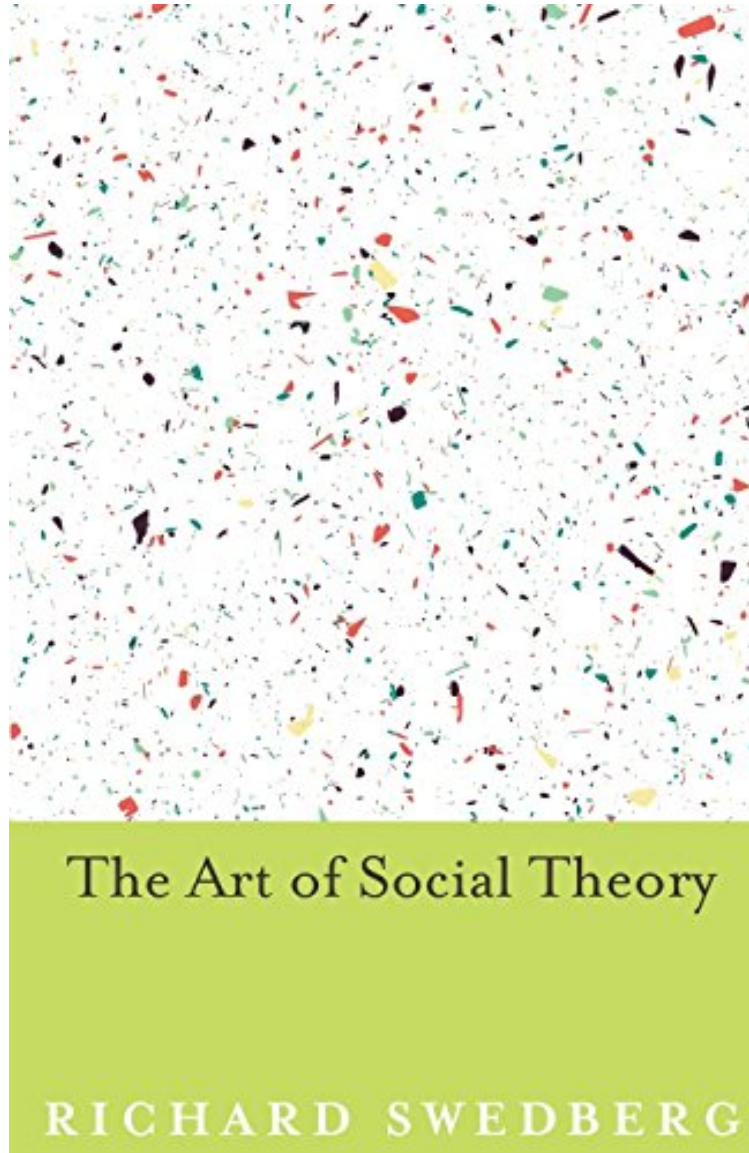


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The Art of Social Theory

Richard Swedberg

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Richard Swedberg : The Art of Social Theory before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Art of Social Theory:

13 of 15 people found the following review helpful. Good for young faculty to produce something interesting By Jackal
The book deals with the explorative phase of a research project, which the author argues is not taken seriously. The target is undergraduate and graduate students according to the author. Personally, I do not think any

undergraduate student can appreciate this book. I would consider junior faculty members the core audience as well as thoughtful doctoral students. I would also tentatively recommend the book to academically inclined equity analysts, strategy consultants, political forecasters that need to form hypotheses in their work. There are lots of useful bits in the book, if you have an academic bent. So I would encourage people in my target audience to read the book. I will highlight three weaknesses so the potential reader knows what to expect: 1. The book has too much thinking by reference. The emphasis is on what others have said as opposed to what the author is saying. Thoughtful sociologists have a maddening tendency to refer back to their founding fathers. That is okay, but the author has not found a right balance. We are also repeatedly told that Peirce is important, but his importance does not really come across to the reader. 2. The book has several loose ends. In many cases, to understand an argument we have to go to the sources provided by the author. This is very laborious. Let me illustrate by one example: In one paragraph, he states that we can learn from historians and he provides two references. That's all. I would have preferred the basic argument presented and then the references. However, I must add that the author provides interesting references for the reader that wants to follow up and read another couple of books. 3. The book is very episodic and tentative. If the author wanted to write a practical book he could have been a bit more prescriptive, for instance by providing some examples or exemplars. However, this would go against the norms in sociology, the author's own field. He does not want to irritate colleagues that might recommend the book. Being prescriptive in sociology is like swearing in church. (Most sociologists are too left-wing for church, but that is another story.) 4. He includes one chapter on teaching the topic of theorizing, but he only throws some ideas on the table. Probably stimulating if you are a university teacher, but the chapter feels very half-baked. Despite the negative tone of the book I still like it. The book is a solid three. Recommended if you read many books. I hope the author revisits the book and writes a second edition in ten years time. 0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Customer A good book to help you come up with a bulls*** sociological theory of your own.

In the social sciences today, students are taught theory by reading and analyzing the works of Karl Marx, Max Weber, and other foundational figures of the discipline. What they rarely learn, however, is how to actually theorize. *The Art of Social Theory* is a practical guide to doing just that. In this one-of-a-kind user's manual for social theorists, Richard Swedberg explains how theorizing occurs in what he calls the context of discovery, a process in which the researcher gathers preliminary data and thinks creatively about it using tools such as metaphor, analogy, and typology. He guides readers through each step of the theorists' art, from observation and naming to concept formation and explanation. To theorize well, you also need a sound knowledge of existing social theory. Swedberg introduces readers to the most important theories and concepts, and discusses how to go about mastering them. If you can think, you can also learn to theorize. This book shows you how. Concise and accessible, *The Art of Social Theory* features helpful examples throughout, and also provides practical exercises that enable readers to learn through doing.

"[C]oncise and readable. . . . Writing in accessible language and using the canon of social theorists to illustrate points, Swedberg meets a need for practitioners and students alike."--Choice
From the Back Cover "Who expected new ideas about 'the art of social theory,' or even knew that it was an 'art'? Vintage Swedberg: wry and erudite yet engaging and accessible, drawing on philosophy, epistemology, and cognitive science to argue that though theorizing requires creativity and imagination, it can be effectively taught. Read this."--Mark Granovetter, Stanford University
"This is a book about how to go about theorizing in the social sciences. It speaks to graduate students preparing for a dissertation and, perhaps more, to their mentors. It is a perfect textbook for a graduate seminar, and offers a stimulating challenge to any social scientist who is curious about how his or her own 'art of theorizing' compares with Swedberg's. I've been a theoretical social scientist for more than half a century, and I was captivated."--Thomas C. Schelling, winner of the Nobel Prize in economics
"Swedberg's book is a marvelous introduction to the craft of theorizing. This is no abstract primer. It describes how people actually go about theorizing and linking their theories to methods. By recognizing that we all theorize all of the time, Swedberg demystifies the process, making it accessible and exciting. *The Art of Social Theory* is erudite and rich with historical allusion. It is a pleasure to read."--Frank Dobbin, author of *Inventing Equal Opportunity*
"A unique meditation on the meaning and purpose of theory and theorizing. By opening up to students how theorizing is an intellectual craft, Swedberg brings the subject alive in a direct and real way. *The Art of Social Theory* will change how we teach theory and theorizing in sociology."--Isaac Ariail Reed, author of *Interpretation and Social Knowledge: On the Use of Theory in the Human Sciences*
About the Author Richard Swedberg is professor of sociology at Cornell University. His books include *Tocqueville's Political Economy*, *Principles of Economic Sociology*, and *Max Weber and the Idea of Economic Sociology* (all Princeton).