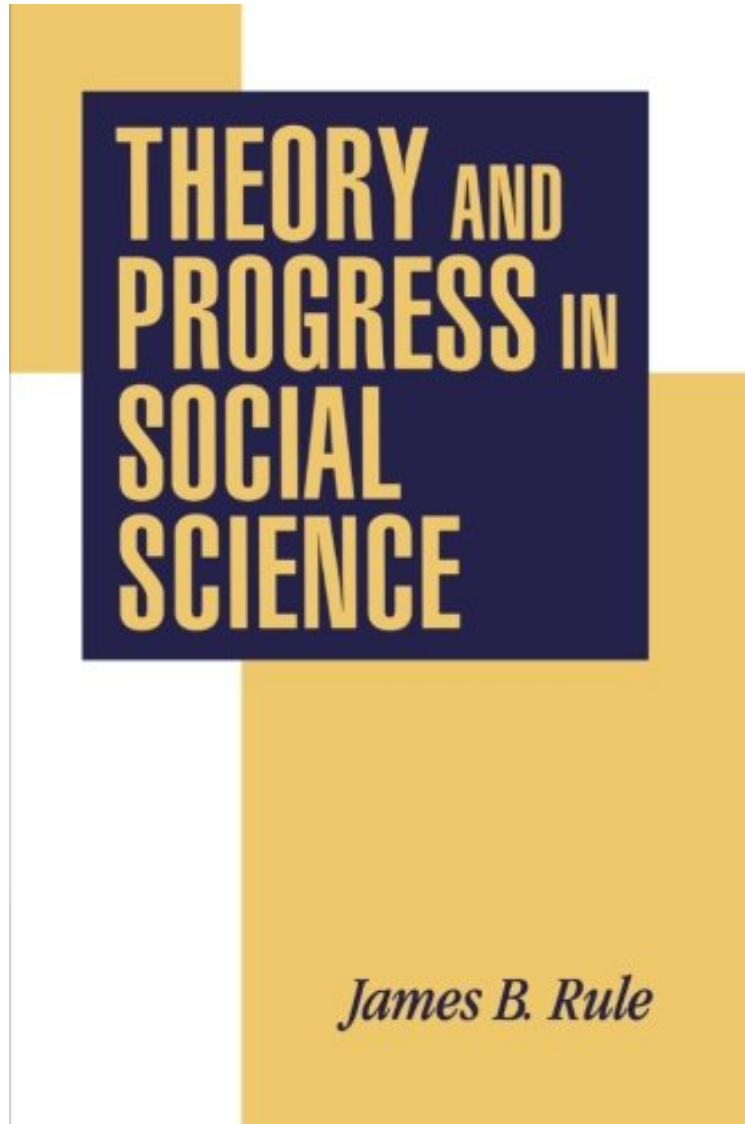


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Theory and Progress in Social Science

James B. Rule

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James B. Rule : Theory and Progress in Social Science before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Theory and Progress in Social Science:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Profound, important, and timely By A Customer Rule's book is a rare example of American sociology that will be recognized inside and outside of the U.S. as exposing and rightfully criticizing the current exponential accumulation of knowledge which is often misunderstood as progress per se. Rule's book first caught my skeptical curiosity, then gained my serious attention, and finally generated admiration and

satisfaction because "Theory and Progress in Social Science" combines the best of our scholarly endeavors. It is written in a clear and transparent manner which makes it not only a delight for the expert and connoisseur but also readable for the lay-person interested in the topic and field. Further, the book brilliantly tackles complicated issues that are, or better should be, at the center of our intellectual inquiry in the social sciences. Its broad range and -- at the same time - depth, rigor, intellectual richness, and humor enlightens profoundly our understanding of what is at stake for sociology today: the quest for a meaningful, enduring, empirically-grounded, responsible and applicable accumulation of sociological knowledge and theorizing about social phenomena. Rule not only masterfully paints with a few strokes a rich peinture of the current theoretical "marketplace," he also develops criteria to separate the wheat from the chaff and to distinguish pseudo-scientific fads and redundant theorizing from "authentic progress" in the accumulation of sociological knowledge that can stand a test for some time to come. I wholly support what another reviewer wrote: "All those interested in improving the quality of sociological discourse should read this book." Rule's review of the state of sociological inquiry elegantly and forcefully sets new standards; it towers definitively over a multitude of short-lived and fashionable publications in the field.

This work attacks questions that have long troubled social scientists--questions of the cumulative nature of social inquiry. Does the knowledge generated by the study of social, political, and economic life grow more comprehensive over time? Do today's social scientists in any meaningful sense know more than their intellectual ancestors about such perennial concerns as the origins of war and peace, or the causes of economic growth, or the forces shaping social stratification, or origins of civil upheaval? These questions go to the heart of social scientists' soul-searching as to whether they are indeed engaged in "science."

"Theory and Progress in Social Science is a perceptive, thought-provoking book--an invitation to sensible thinking about theory in social science during an era when too much jargonistic solipsism prevails." Theda Skocpol, Harvard University"James Rule's book is a unique analysis of the fate of a wide variety of research programs in social science, from formerly fashionable to currently theoretically correct. The book is written elegantly, forcefully, and - most importantly - with great clarity. It will be indispensable in any course on contemporary social theory." Robert R. Alford, City University of New York Graduate Center"This book shines with sense and intelligence. Rule asks why social theory is so rarely cumulative, why fashion seems as important as progress in its sequences. Carefully, he mounts a polite polemic against the blustering imperialism that so often characterizes contemporary theories. All those interested in improving the quality of sociological discourse should read this book." Michael Mann, University of California, Los Angeles"James Rule's pluralism is just what sociology needs. It's about time we stopped fighting with each other over the one way to truth - or tenure - and come to understand that a discipline which studies eclectic human beings needs eclectic theory." Alan Wolfe, Boston University"An intellectual program, Rule argues, should be judged by its contribution to the first-order questions of perennial concern. Rule examines some of the most popular intellectual movements of the 1980s and 90s, among them rational choice, network analysis, and feminist theory, and asks whether they too are destined to be yet more of those carcasses of dead intellectual fashions which dot the landscape of 20th-century social science." Randall Collins, University of California, Riverside"Rule is well worth reading.... The book's pleasing candor and lucid style recommend it as an antidote to the often beguiling but usually misleading claims of social theory." Kiernan Healy, Theory Society"...the issues he raises are likely to stimulate thought. Rule's ideas will be useful to those interested in theory and the sociology of science, as well as to anyone who has tried to explain the point of their research to outsiders." Christine Horne, American Jrnl of Sociology"Rule has an answer that is well worth pondering." Anthony Oberschall, Social ForcesAbout the AuthorJames B. Rule is professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and is a member of the editorial board of Dissent magazine.