



The Metaphorical Society: An Invitation to Social Theory

By Daniel Rigney

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This book introduces the novice reader to modern social theory through the creative exploration of eight major metaphors that have shaped Western understandings of human society. Rigney vividly yet concisely examines each major theoretical perspective in sociology, including functionalism, conflict theory, rational choice, and symbolic interactionism. He shows how each of these theories is rooted in a particular metaphorical tradition. Over decades and centuries, Rigney argues, social theorists have variously likened societies to organisms and living systems, to machines, battlefields, legal systems, marketplaces, games, theatrical productions, and discourses. Most interestingly, Rigney deftly shows how nearly all Western social theories fit with one or more of the metaphors. He emphasizes a humanistic understanding of society with an emphasis on the creative agency of social actors and communities. The book offers students a rich understanding of social theory, yet it is simultaneously concise and broad ranging, allowing instructors to further pursue detailed exploration of any perspectives they choose.

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Editorial Review

Review

A highly readable and innovative work?one that deserves a wide audience. By articulating eight major metaphors in social theory, Rigney opens vistas for interpreting present-day social and cultural reality. (Gideon Sjoberg, University of Texas)

Social science and social life both depend on imagination. Rigney's *The Metaphorical Society* offers tools for understanding the world and an engagement in the critical task of seeing what each tool obscures and what it reveals. (Craig Calhoun, president, Social Science Research Council; professor of sociology and history, New York University)

A nicely compact book that covers nearly every kind of social theorizing imaginable?not just sociology, but the array of academic disciplines, plus politics, poetry, business and industry, religious and military reasoning, common sense, and on and on: They are all there, side by side, though sociology is predominantly featured. The prose is wonderful, smooth, conversational, lucid, and flowing. Citations are detailed and the bibliography thorough. (*Contemporary Sociology*)

This book will prove useful not only to the beginner who is trying to develop a sense of what is involved in the practice of theorizing, but also to sociologists and theorists who want to develop an understanding of how they use language, and language uses them. (*BSA Network*)

Exceptionally well written and learned. . . . Should find a significant readership in undergraduate and graduate courses. (Ben Agger)

About the Author

Daniel Rigney is professor of sociology and director of the honors program at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas.

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