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Durkheimian sociology: cultural studies

Edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander
University of California, Los Angeles



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For Robert Bellah

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This volume was conceived amidst the effervescence of a small and lively conference on “Emile Durkheim’s Sociology of Religion,” sponsored by the Werner-Reimers-Stiftung in June 1983, which took place on the foundation’s handsome grounds in Bad Homburg. Werner Gephart amicably hosted the meeting, organizing it specifically around the “later Durkheimian” theme. That only two of the original conference participants have contributed to the present book – Hans-Peter Müller and myself – detracts in no way from the value of those early discussions. To both Gephart and the Werner-Reimers-Stiftung, therefore, I would like to record my thanks.

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It has now been seventy years since Emile Durkheim’s death, and it is one of the fundamental premises of this volume that his intellectual bequest – the legacy of his later years – has yet fully to be claimed. In the years intervening, of course, a number of important scholars and theorists have pointed the way. For me personally, the most important has been Robert Bellah. A sensitive and life-long student of the great French master, Bellah communicated to his students the unique symbolic emphasis that separates Durkheim from the other classics and that constitutes such an important challenge for contemporary sociology. The present volume takes up this challenge, even if it represents only one small step along the way.

Jeffrey C. Alexander