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978-0-521-79229-5 - Dissecting the Social: On the Principles of Analytical Sociology

Peter Hedström

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Dissecting the Social

Over the past few decades serious reservations have been expressed about the explanatory power of sociological theory and research. In this important book, leading sociologist Peter Hedström outlines the foundations of an analytically oriented sociology that seeks to address this criticism. Building on his earlier influential contributions to contemporary debates, Professor Hedström argues for a systematic development of sociological theory so that it has the explanatory power and precision to inform sociological research and understanding. He discusses various mechanisms of action and interaction and shows how strong links can be forged between the micro and the macro, and between theory and empirical research. Combining new approaches to theory and methodology and using extensive examples to illustrate how they might be applied, this clear, concise and original book will appeal to a broad range of social scientists.

PETER HEDSTRÖM is Professor of Sociology and Official Fellow of Nuffield College, University of Oxford. He is the editor, with R. Swedberg, of *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1998) and the author of numerous articles in leading academic journals.

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Preface

In this book I seek to clarify what a mechanism-based explanatory strategy looks like. At the core of the approach is a set of mechanisms that specifies how individuals are influenced by those with whom they interact. Such mechanisms are not only the object of this book, they also explain why the book looks the way it does.

I have benefited greatly from interactions with numerous colleagues in Europe as well as in the United States. First of all I would like to thank Yvonne Åberg. Not only is she the co-author of one of the chapters, she has also served as a constructive discussion partner throughout this book project. Others who have made time to read and comment on the book include Peter Abell, Patrik Aspers, Filippo Barbera, Peter Bearman, Markus Berger, Michael Biggs, Raymond Boudon, Richard Breen, Magnus Bygren, Mohamed Cherkaoui, Christofer Edling, David Freedman, John Goldthorpe, Carl le Grand, Ann-Sofie Kolm, Fredrik Liljeros, Lars Lindahl, Renate Meyntz, Carina Mood-Roman, Krister Segerberg, Mattias Smångs, Ryszard Szulkin, Lars Udehn and Björn Wittrock. I am extremely grateful to you all.

I also have had the great fortune to be affiliated to several excellent academic institutions; the Department of Sociology at Stockholm University, the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (SCASSS) and Nuffield College, Oxford. These institutions have allowed me to concentrate on my research for extended periods of time and have provided most stimulating intellectual environments. I am particularly indebted to SCASSS. Without its generous support at the outset of this project, this book would never have been written.

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Last but not least I would like to express my gratitude to Sarah Caro, my editor at Cambridge University Press, for her patience and support.

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