Preface

I completed the first draft of this book while holding a Fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. My stay at the Center was funded jointly by the National Science Foundation (Grant No. BNS87-00864) and by the Center for Advanced Studies of the University of Virginia, which awarded me a Fellowship for 1988–1990. I am greatly indebted to both institutions.

In the first half of 1990, the uniquely pleasant and supportive atmosphere of the CASBS, as well as the companionship of my wife, Pat, made it possible for this book to be drafted fairly rapidly. Unfortunately, after my return to Virginia the project lay fallow for a long time; and now that I look back on its genesis I realize uneasily how prolonged it has been.

I first read, and took a great number of notes from, *Philosophie des Geldes* in the mid-1970s. Unlike other books of mine, this one did not take shape after I had repeatedly discussed its content in the context of my teaching, since in the courses on "classical" sociological theory I gave several times at Edinburgh, and a few times at the University of Virginia, I never was able to
devote more than one hour or so to *The Philosophy of Money*. In 1987, however, I was invited to offer the Mini-seminar in European Social Theory in the Department of Sociology at New York University (to which I am very grateful for that invitation). I gave as my topic "Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*: A Thematic Inventory," and while preparing the outlines of my seminar presentations I first experimented with the arrangement of the argument used in this book.

In fact, my treatment of Simmel's masterpiece, which is preceded by two chapters on the context of the work's genesis, does not really seek to take inventory of its thematic riches, but deals with its content in a relatively selective manner. Essentially, I seek to assist those who have not yet read *The Philosophy of Money*, and those who are in the process of reading it, in several ways. First, I focus their attention on four main themes. Two of these—the nature of action in general and economic action in particular, and the notion of objective spirit—are not explicitly "thematized" by Simmel himself. The other two are; they consist respectively in the nature of money (which is of course the book's eponymous theme) and in the nature of modern society. Second, I have sought to be more systematic in the treatment of these topics than Simmel himself is. (This, one might say, is not difficult, Simmel being notoriously unsystematic.) What this effort involves is largely a matter of assembling from the text numerous, fragmented, and dispersed arguments about a particular topic, and rendering them as components of a unified treatment of it. Third, my book is much shorter than *The Philosophy of Money*, and might thus assist potential readers daunted by the size of Simmel's work in learning what that book has to of-
I have also sought to express myself in a more accessible manner than Simmel does. He was a very accomplished and often particularly effective writer, as is apparent from the English translation of *Philosophie des Geldes*; but the philosophical tradition in which he wrote did not place a great premium on concise and plain phrasing. In any case, my friend Guenther Roth may be only slightly overstating the case when he suggests that today *The Philosophy of Money* is practically unreadable. By being both considerably shorter and (I hope) somewhat clearer than Simmel's text, my own may constitute for readers a less demanding way of familiarizing themselves with that text's contents. It will, however, best fulfill its purpose if it persuades some of them to themselves read Simmel on money.

Although, as I indicated, my first sustained encounter with *Philosophie des Geldes* had me grappling with Simmel's original text, on subsequent readings I used mainly the excellent English translation by Tom Bottemore and David Frisby published by Routledge in 1978. While drafting this book at Stanford, however, I availed myself of the just-published Suhrkamp edition, edited as volume 6 of the *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe* by David Frisby and Klaus Christian Köhnke (Frankfurt, 1989). In what follows, all quotations are in my own translation from this German edition, but page references are also given, in italics, to the English edition. This translation was reprinted in 1991, with much new and interesting editorial material by my friend David Frisby, to whom I am grateful for the help he has given me in writing this book.

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