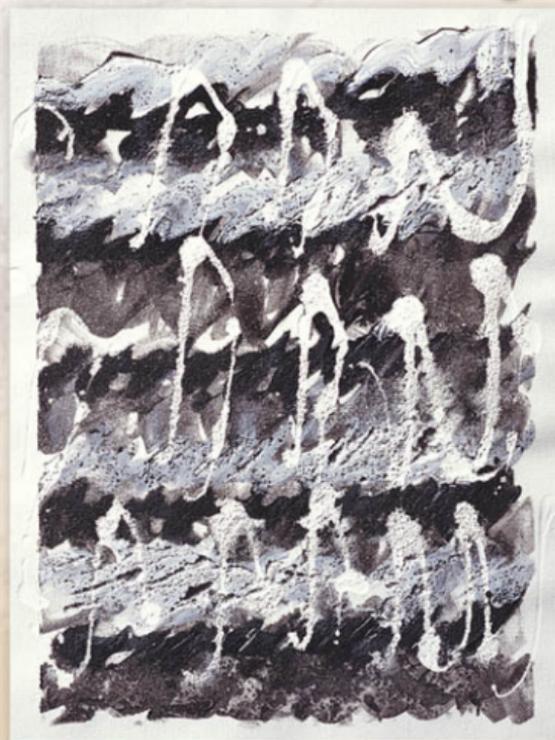


Eighth Edition

Sociological Theory



George Ritzer

Sociological Theory

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Sociological Theory

George Ritzer

University of Maryland





SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY, EIGHTH EDITION

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About the Author

George Ritzer is Distinguished University Professor at the University of Maryland, where he has also been a Distinguished Scholar-Teacher and received a Teaching Excellence Award. In 2000, he received the Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award of the American Sociological Association, and in 2004, he received an honorary doctorate from LaTrobe University in Melbourne, Australia.

Dr. Ritzer has served as Chair of the American Sociological Association's Sections on Theoretical Sociology and Organizations and Occupations. He held the UNESCO Chair in Social Theory at the Russian Academy of Sciences and a Fulbright-Hays Chair at York University in Canada, and he received a Fulbright-Hays award to the Netherlands. He was Scholar-in-Residence at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study and at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences.

Professor Ritzer's main theoretical interests lie in metatheory and in applied social theory. In metatheory, his contributions include *Sociology: A Multiple Paradigm Science* (1975, 1980), *Toward an Integrated Sociological Paradigm* (1981), and *Metatheorizing in Sociology* (1991). George Ritzer is perhaps best known, however, for *The McDonaldization of Society* (5th ed., 2008), translated into more than a dozen languages, and for several related books (also with a number of translations), including *Expressing America: A Critique of the Global Credit Card Society* (1995), *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (2nd ed., 2005), *The Globalization of Nothing 2* (2007), and the forthcoming (with Craig Lair) *Outsourcing: Globalization and Beyond*. He edited the two-volume *Encyclopedia of Social Theory* (2005), the eleven-volume *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2007), and *The Blackwell Companion to Globalization* (2007), and he is the founding editor of the *Journal of Consumer Culture*.

In 2010, McGraw-Hill published the third edition of Professor Ritzer's *Contemporary Sociological Theory and Its Classic Roots: The Basics*. Also in 2010, McGraw-Hill published the sixth edition of *Classical Sociological Theory*. The latter text, as well as this one, have been translated into a number of languages.

Brief Contents

Biographical and Autobiographical Sketches xvi

Preface xviii

PART I

Classical Sociological Theory 1

CHAPTER 1 *A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory: The Early Years 1*

CHAPTER 2 *Karl Marx 43*

CHAPTER 3 *Emile Durkheim 76*

CHAPTER 4 *Max Weber 112*

CHAPTER 5 *Georg Simmel 158*

PART II

Modern Sociological Theory: The Major Schools 189

CHAPTER 6 *A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory: The Later Years 189*

CHAPTER 7 *Structural Functionalism, Neofunctionalism, and Conflict Theory 236*

CHAPTER 8 *Varieties of Neo-Marxian Theory 277*

CHAPTER 9 *Systems Theory 331*

CHAPTER 10 *Symbolic Interactionism 351*

CHAPTER 11 *Ethnomethodology 391*

CHAPTER 12 *Exchange, Network, and Rational Choice Theories 416*

CHAPTER 13 *Contemporary Feminist Theory 454*

Contents

Biographical and Autobiographical Sketches xvi
Preface xviii

PART I Classical Sociological Theory 1

CHAPTER 1 *A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory: The Early Years* 1

Introduction 2

Social Forces in the Development of Sociological Theory 5

Political Revolutions 5

*The Industrial Revolution and the Rise
of Capitalism* 5

The Rise of Socialism 6

Feminism 6

Urbanization 7

Religious Change 7

The Growth of Science 8

Intellectual Forces and the Rise of Sociological Theory 8

The Enlightenment 8

*The Conservative Reaction to the
Enlightenment* 9

The Development of French Sociology 11

*Alexis de Tocqueville
(1805–1859)* 11

*Claude Henri Saint-Simon
(1760–1825)* 14

Auguste Comte (1798–1857) 15

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) 19

The Development of German Sociology 21

*The Roots and Nature of the Theories
of Karl Marx (1818–1883)* 21

*The Roots and Nature of the Theories
of Max Weber (1864–1920) and
Georg Simmel (1858–1918)* 26

The Origins of British Sociology 32

*Political Economy, Ameliorism, and
Social Evolution* 34

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) 36

The Key Figure in Early Italian Sociology 39

Turn-of-the-Century Developments in European Marxism 40

CHAPTER 2 *Karl Marx* 43

Introduction 43

The Dialectic 45

Dialectical Method 46

Fact and Value 46

Reciprocal Relations 46

Past, Present, Future 47

No Inevitabilities 47

Actors and Structures 48

Human Potential 48*Labor 52***Alienation 53****The Structures of Capitalist Society 56***Commodities 57**Fetishism of Commodities 58**Capital, Capitalists, and the Proletariat 59**Exploitation 60**Class Conflict 62**Capitalism as a Good Thing 64***Materialist Conception of History 65****Cultural Aspects of Capitalist Society 67***Ideology 67**Religion 70***Marx's Economics: A Case Study 70****Communism 73****Criticisms 73****CHAPTER 3 *Emile Durkheim* 76****Introduction 76****Social Facts 77***Material and Nonmaterial Social Facts 79**Types of Nonmaterial Social Facts 80****The Division of Labor in Society* 84***Mechanical and Organic Solidarity 85**Dynamic Density 88**Repressive and Restitutive Law 89**Normal and Pathological 90**Justice 91***Suicide 92***The Four Types of Suicide 93**Suicide Rates and Social Reform 96****The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* 97***Early and Late Durkheimian Theory 97**Theory of Religion—The Sacred and the Profane 98**Why Primitive? 100**Totemism 100**Sociology of Knowledge 101**Collective Effervescence 102***Moral Education and Social Reform 103***Morality 104**Moral Education 105**Occupational Associations 106***Criticisms 107***Functionalism and Positivism 107**Other Criticisms 108***CHAPTER 4 *Max Weber* 112****Methodology 113***History and Sociology 113**Verstehen 116**Causality 118**Ideal Types 119**Values 121***Substantive Sociology 124***What Is Sociology? 124**Social Action 125**Class, Status, and Party 127**Structures of Authority 128**Rationalization 136**Religion and the Rise of Capitalism 146***Criticisms 154****CHAPTER 5 *Georg Simmel* 158****Primary Concerns 158***Levels and Areas of Concern 159**Dialectical Thinking 162***Individual Consciousness 164**

- In Chapter 17, following an overview of the work of Michel Foucault, a major discussion of the work of the Italian social thinker Giorgio Agamben has been added.
- There is a new biographical sketch on Joseph Schumpeter in Chapter 6.
- The text has been refreshed in many places, especially with the addition of citations to the most recent work on various theories.

Cuts were made in various places, but no major theories or theorists were eliminated. Thus, the text is much as it always has been but is renewed once again. The wonderful things about theory are both its continuity and its ever-changing character. I have tried to communicate those and other joys of sociological theory to readers in the early stages of their exposure to it.

Acknowledgments

Once again, I want to thank Patricia Lengermann and Gillian Niebrugge for revising Chapter 13, their pathbreaking chapter on contemporary feminist theory. Their chapter not only has made this book much stronger but also has had a strong influence on theorizing independent of the book. I also thank Matthias Junge for his contribution to the section on Niklas Luhmann (in Chapter 9) and Mike Ryan for his on queer theory (in Chapter 18). Thanks also to Jillet Sam for her assistance in the preparation of this edition. Unfortunately, Doug Goodman, coauthor of the previous edition, was unable to participate in this new edition. However, many of his contributions continue to be found in this text. Thanks, as well, to those at McGraw-Hill including Gina Boedeker, Nicole Bridge, and Craig Leonard.

Thanks also go to a panel of reviewers whose comments and suggestions helped to make this a better book:

Chris Faircloth, *Xavier University of Louisiana*
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George Ritzer

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Classical Sociological Theory

C H A P T E R 1

A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory: The Early Years

Chapter Outline

Introduction

Social Forces in the Development of Sociological Theory

Intellectual Forces and the Rise of Sociological Theory

The Development of French Sociology

The Development of German Sociology

The Origins of British Sociology

The Key Figure in Early Italian Sociology

Turn-of-the-Century Developments in European Marxism

A useful way to begin a book designed to introduce the range of sociological theory is with several one-line summaries of various theories:

- The modern world is an iron cage of rational systems from which there is no escape.
- Capitalism tends to sow the seeds of its own destruction.
- The modern world has less moral cohesion than earlier societies had.
- The city spawns a particular type of personality.
- In their social lives, people tend to put on a variety of theatrical performances.
- The social world is defined by principles of reciprocity in give-and-take relationships.
- People create the social worlds that ultimately come to enslave them.
- People always retain the capacity to change the social worlds that constrain them.

- Society is an integrated system of social structures and functions.
- Society is a “juggernaut” with the ever-present possibility of running amok.
- Although it appears that the Western world has undergone a process of liberalization, in fact it has grown increasingly oppressive.
- The world has entered a new postmodern era increasingly defined by the inauthentic, the fake, by simulations of reality.
- Paradoxically, globalization is associated with the worldwide spread of “nothing.”
- Nonhuman objects are increasingly seen as key actors in networks.

This book is devoted to helping the reader better understand these and many other theoretical ideas, as well as the larger theories from which they are drawn.

Introduction

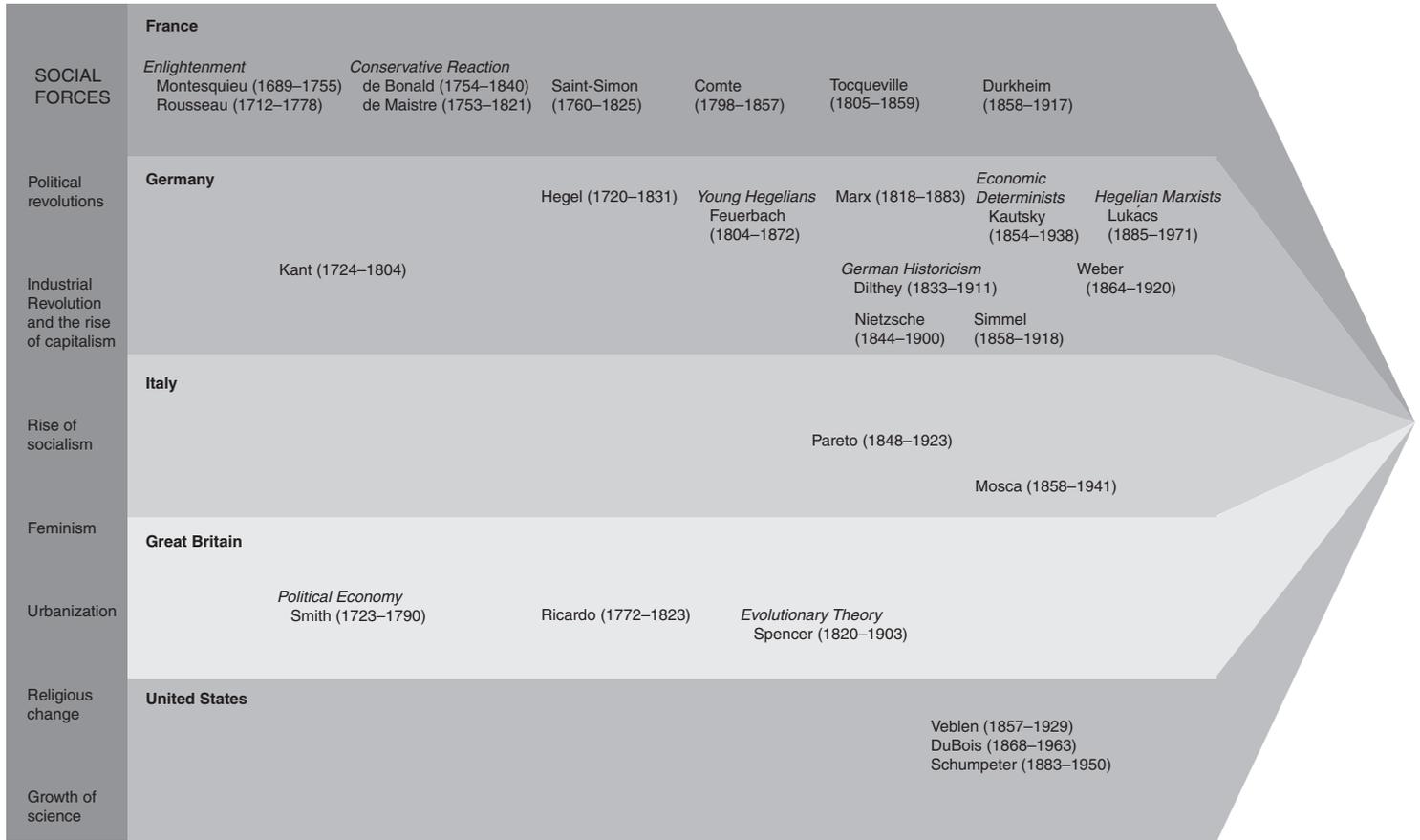
Presenting a history of sociological theory is an important task (S. Turner, 1998), but because I devote only two chapters (1 and 6) to it, what I offer is a highly selective historical sketch (Giddens, 1995). The idea is to provide the reader with a scaffolding which should help in putting the later detailed discussions of theorists and theories in a larger context. As the reader proceeds through the later chapters, it will prove useful to return to these two overview chapters and place the discussions in their context. (It will be especially useful to glance back occasionally to Figures 1.1 and 6.1, which are schematic representations of the histories covered in those chapters.)

The theories treated in the body of this book have a *wide range* of application, deal with *centrally important social issues*, and have *stood the test of time*. These criteria constitute my definition of *sociological theory*.¹

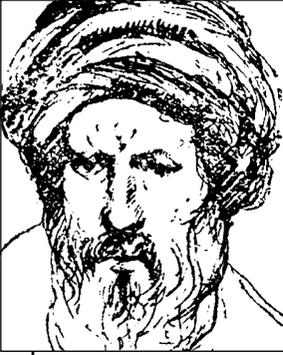
A number of the theorists who are briefly discussed in Chapter 1 (for example, Herbert Spencer and Auguste Comte) will not receive detailed treatment later because they are of little more than historical interest. Other theorists (for example, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim) will be discussed in Chapter 1 in their historical context, and they will receive detailed treatment later because of their continuing importance. The focus is on the important theoretical work of sociologists or the work done by individuals in other fields that has come to be defined as important in sociology. To put it succinctly, this is a book about the “big ideas” in sociology that have stood the test of time (or promise to)—idea systems that deal with major social issues and that are far-reaching in scope.

We cannot establish the precise date when sociological theory began. People have been thinking about, and developing theories of, social life since early in history.

¹ These three criteria constitute my definition of sociological theory. Such a definition stands in contrast to the formal, “scientific” definitions (Jasso, 2001) that often are used in theory texts of this type. A scientific definition might be that a theory is a set of interrelated propositions that allows for the systematization of knowledge, explanation, and prediction of social life and the generation of new research hypotheses (Faia, 1986). Although such a definition has a number of attractions, it simply does not fit many of the idea systems that are discussed in this book. In other words, most classical (and contemporary) theories fall short on one or more of the formal components of theory, but they are nonetheless considered theories by most sociologists.



3 **FIGURE 1.1** *Sociological Theory: The Early Years*



ABDEL RAHMAN IBN-KHALDUN

A Biographical Sketch

There is a tendency to think of sociology as exclusively a comparatively modern, Western phenomenon. In fact, however, scholars were developing sociological ideas and theories long ago and in other parts of the world. One example is Abdel Rahman Ibn-Khaldun.

Ibn-Khaldun was born in Tunis, North Africa, on May 27, 1332 (Faghirzadeh, 1982). Born to an educated family, Ibn-Khaldun was schooled in the Koran (the Muslim holy book), mathematics, and history. In his lifetime, he served a variety of sultans in Tunis, Morocco, Spain, and Algeria as ambassador, chamberlain, and member of the scholars' council. He also spent two years in prison in Morocco for his belief that state rulers were not divine leaders. After approximately two decades of political activity, Ibn-Khaldun returned to North Africa, where he undertook an intensive five-year period of study and writing. Works produced during this period increased his fame and led to a lectureship at the center of Islamic study, Al-Azhar Mosque University in Cairo. In his well-attended lectures on society and sociology, Ibn-Khaldun stressed the importance of linking sociological thought and historical observation.

By the time he died in 1406, Ibn-Khaldun had produced a corpus of work that had many ideas in common with contemporary sociology. He was committed to the scientific study of society, empirical research, and the search for causes of social phenomena. He devoted considerable attention to various social institutions (for example, politics, economy) and their interrelationships. He was interested in comparing primitive and modern societies. Ibn-Khaldun did not have a dramatic impact on classical sociology, but as scholars in general, and Islamic scholars in particular, rediscover his work, he may come to be seen as being of greater historical significance.

But we will not go back to the early historic times of the Greeks or Romans or even to the Middle Ages. We will not even go back to the seventeenth century, although Olson (1993) has traced the sociological tradition to the mid-1600s and the work of James Harrington on the relationship between the economy and the polity. This is not because people in those epochs did not have sociologically relevant ideas, but because the return on our investment in time would be small; we would spend a lot of time getting very few ideas that are relevant to modern sociology. In any case, none of the thinkers associated with those eras thought of themselves, and few are now thought of, as sociologists. (For a discussion of one exception, see the biographical sketch of Ibn-Khaldun.) It is only in the 1800s that we begin to find thinkers who can be clearly

identified as sociologists. These are the classical sociological thinkers we shall be interested in (Camic, 1997; for a debate about what makes theory classical, see R. Collins, 1997b; Connell, 1997), and we begin by examining the main social and intellectual forces that shaped their ideas.

Social Forces in the Development of Sociological Theory

All intellectual fields are profoundly shaped by their social settings. This is particularly true of sociology, which not only is derived from that setting but takes the social setting as its basic subject matter. I will focus briefly on a few of the most important social conditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conditions that were of the utmost significance in the development of sociology. I also will take the occasion to begin introducing the major figures in the history of sociological theory.

Political Revolutions

The long series of political revolutions that were ushered in by the French Revolution in 1789 and carried over through the nineteenth century was the most immediate factor in the rise of sociological theorizing. The impact of these revolutions on many societies was enormous, and many positive changes resulted. However, what attracted the attention of many early theorists was not the positive consequences but the negative effects of such changes. These writers were particularly disturbed by the resulting chaos and disorder, especially in France. They were united in a desire to restore order to society. Some of the more extreme thinkers of this period literally wanted a return to the peaceful and relatively orderly days of the Middle Ages. The more sophisticated thinkers recognized that social change had made such a return impossible. Thus they sought instead to find new bases of order in societies that had been overturned by the political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This interest in the issue of social order was one of the major concerns of classical sociological theorists, especially Comte, Durkheim, and Parsons.

The Industrial Revolution and the Rise of Capitalism

At least as important as political revolution in shaping sociological theory was the Industrial Revolution, which swept through many Western societies, mainly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Industrial Revolution was not a single event but many interrelated developments that culminated in the transformation of the Western world from a largely agricultural to an overwhelmingly industrial system. Large numbers of people left farms and agricultural work for the industrial occupations offered in the burgeoning factories. The factories themselves were transformed by a long series of technological improvements. Large economic bureaucracies arose to provide the many services needed by industry and the emerging capitalist economic system. In this economy, the ideal was a free marketplace where the many products of

an industrial system could be exchanged. Within this system, a few profited greatly while the majority worked long hours for low wages. A reaction against the industrial system and against capitalism in general followed and led to the labor movement as well as to various radical movements aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system.

The Industrial Revolution, capitalism, and the reaction against them all involved an enormous upheaval in Western society, an upheaval that affected sociologists greatly. Four major figures in the early history of sociological theory—Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Georg Simmel—were preoccupied, as were many lesser thinkers, with these changes and the problems they created for society as a whole. They spent their lives studying these problems, and in many cases they endeavored to develop programs that would help solve them.

The Rise of Socialism

One set of changes aimed at coping with the excesses of the industrial system and capitalism can be combined under the heading “socialism” (Beilharz, 2005g). Although some sociologists favored socialism as a solution to industrial problems, most were personally and intellectually opposed to it. On one side, Karl Marx was an active supporter of the overthrow of the capitalist system and its replacement by a socialist system. Although Marx did not develop a theory of socialism *per se*, he spent a great deal of time criticizing various aspects of capitalist society. In addition, he engaged in a variety of political activities that he hoped would help bring about the rise of socialist societies.

However, Marx was atypical in the early years of sociological theory. Most of the early theorists, such as Weber and Durkheim, were opposed to socialism (at least as it was envisioned by Marx). Although they recognized the problems within capitalist society, they sought social reform within capitalism rather than the social revolution argued for by Marx. They feared socialism more than they did capitalism. This fear played a far greater role in shaping sociological theory than did Marx’s support of the socialist alternative to capitalism. In fact, as we will see, in many cases sociological theory developed in reaction against Marxian and, more generally, against socialist theory.

Feminism

In one sense there has always been a feminist perspective. Wherever women are subordinated—and they have been subordinated almost always and everywhere—they seem to have recognized and protested that situation in some form (Lerner, 1993). While precursors can be traced to the 1630s, high points of feminist activity and writing occurred in the liberationist moments of modern Western history: a first flurry of productivity in the 1780s and 1790s with the debates surrounding the American and French revolutions; a far more organized, focused effort in the 1850s as part of the mobilization against slavery and for political rights for the middle class; and the massive mobilization for women’s suffrage and for industrial and civic reform legislation in the early twentieth century, especially the Progressive Era in the United States.

All of this had an impact on the development of sociology, in particular on the work of a number of women in or associated with the field—Harriet Martineau (Vetter, 2008), Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, Florence Kelley, Anna Julia Cooper, Ida Wells-Barnett, Marianne Weber, and Beatrice Potter Webb, to name a few. But their creations were, over time, pushed to the periphery of the profession, annexed, discounted, or written out of sociology's public record by the men who were organizing sociology as a professional power base. Feminist concerns filtered into sociology only on the margins, in the work of marginal male theorists or of the increasingly marginalized female theorists. The men who assumed centrality in the profession—from Spencer, through Weber and Durkheim—made basically conservative responses to the feminist arguments going on around them, making issues of gender an inconsequential topic to which they responded conventionally rather than critically in what they identified and publicly promoted as sociology. They responded in this way even as women were writing a significant body of sociological theory. The history of this gender politics in the profession, which is also part of the history of male response to feminist claims, is only now being written (for example, see Deegan, 1988; Fitzpatrick, 1990; L. Gordon, 1994; Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998; R. Rosenberg, 1982).

Urbanization

Partly as a result of the Industrial Revolution, large numbers of people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were uprooted from their rural homes and moved to urban settings. This massive migration was caused, in large part, by the jobs created by the industrial system in the urban areas. But it presented many difficulties for those people who had to adjust to urban life. In addition, the expansion of the cities produced a seemingly endless list of urban problems—overcrowding, pollution, noise, traffic, and so forth. The nature of urban life and its problems attracted the attention of many early sociologists, especially Max Weber and Georg Simmel. In fact, the first major school of American sociology, the Chicago school, was in large part defined by its concern for the city and its interest in using Chicago as a laboratory in which to study urbanization and its problems.

Religious Change

Social changes brought on by political revolutions, the Industrial Revolution, and urbanization had a profound effect on religiosity. Many early sociologists came from religious backgrounds and were actively, and in some cases professionally, involved in religion (Hinkle and Hinkle, 1954). They brought to sociology the same objectives they espoused in their religious lives. They wished to improve people's lives (Vidich and Lyman, 1985). For some (such as Comte), sociology was transformed into a religion. For others, their sociological theories bore an unmistakable religious imprint. Durkheim wrote one of his major works on religion. Morality played a key role not only in Durkheim's sociology but also in the work of Talcott Parsons. A large portion of Weber's work also was devoted to the religions of the world. Marx, too, had an interest in religiosity, but his orientation was far more critical.

The Growth of Science

As sociological theory was being developed, there was an increasing emphasis on science, not only in colleges and universities but in society as a whole. The technological products of science were permeating every sector of life, and science was acquiring enormous prestige. Those associated with the most successful sciences (physics, biology, and chemistry) were accorded honored places in society. Sociologists (especially Comte, Durkheim, Spencer, Mead, and Schutz) from the beginning were preoccupied with science, and many wanted to model sociology after the successful physical and biological sciences. However, a debate soon developed between those who wholeheartedly accepted the scientific model and those (such as Weber) who thought that distinctive characteristics of social life made a wholesale adoption of a scientific model difficult and unwise (Lepenes, 1988). The issue of the relationship between sociology and science is debated to this day, although even a glance at the major journals in the field, at least in the United States, indicates the predominance of those who favor sociology as a science.

Intellectual Forces and the Rise of Sociological Theory

Although social factors are important, the primary focus of this chapter is the intellectual forces that played a central role in shaping sociological theory. In the real world, of course, intellectual factors cannot be separated from social forces. For example, in the discussion of the Enlightenment that follows, we will find that that movement was intimately related to, and in many cases provided the intellectual basis for, the social changes discussed above.

The many intellectual forces that shaped the development of social theories are discussed within the national context where their influence was primarily felt (Levine, 1995; Rundell, 2001). We begin with the Enlightenment and its influences on the development of sociological theory in France.

The Enlightenment

It is the view of many observers that the Enlightenment constitutes a critical development in terms of the later evolution of sociology (Hawthorn, 1976; Hughes, Martin, and Sharrock, 1995; Nisbet, 1967; Zeitlin, 1996). The Enlightenment was a period of remarkable intellectual development and change in philosophical thought.² A number of long-standing ideas and beliefs—many of which related to social life—were overthrown and replaced during the Enlightenment. The most prominent thinkers associated with the Enlightenment were the French philosophers Charles Montesquieu

² This section is based on the work of Irving Zeitlin (1996). Although Zeitlin's analysis is presented here for its coherence, it has a number of limitations: there are better analyses of the Enlightenment, there are many other factors involved in shaping the development of sociology, and Zeitlin tends to overstate his case in places (for example, on the impact of Marx). But on the whole, Zeitlin provides us with a useful starting point, given our objectives in this chapter.

(1689–1755) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778) (B. Singer, 2005a, 2005b). The influence of the Enlightenment on sociological theory, however, was more indirect and negative than it was direct and positive. As Irving Zeitlin puts it, “Early sociology developed as a reaction to the Enlightenment” (1996:10).

The thinkers associated with the Enlightenment were influenced, above all, by two intellectual currents—seventeenth-century philosophy and science.

Seventeenth-century philosophy was associated with the work of thinkers such as René Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke. The emphasis was on producing grand, general, and very abstract systems of ideas that made rational sense. The later thinkers associated with the Enlightenment did not reject the idea that systems of ideas should be general and should make rational sense, but they did make greater efforts to derive their ideas from the real world and to test them there. In other words, they wanted to combine empirical research with reason (Seidman, 1983:36–37). The model for this was science, especially Newtonian physics. At this point, we see the emergence of the application of the scientific method to social issues. Not only did Enlightenment thinkers want their ideas to be, at least in part, derived from the real world, they also wanted them to be useful to the social world, especially in the critical analysis of that world.

Overall, the Enlightenment was characterized by the belief that people could comprehend and control the universe by means of reason and empirical research. The view was that because the physical world was dominated by natural laws, it was likely that the social world was too. Thus it was up to the philosopher, using reason and research, to discover these social laws. Once they understood how the social world worked, the Enlightenment thinkers had a practical goal—the creation of a “better,” more rational world.

With an emphasis on reason, the Enlightenment philosophers were inclined to reject beliefs in traditional authority. When these thinkers examined traditional values and institutions, they often found them to be irrational—that is, contrary to human nature and inhibitive of human growth and development. The mission of the practical and change-oriented philosophers of the Enlightenment was to overcome these irrational systems. The theorists who were most directly and positively influenced by Enlightenment thinking were Alexis de Tocqueville and Karl Marx, although the latter formed his early theoretical ideas in Germany.

The Conservative Reaction to the Enlightenment

On the surface, we might think that French classical sociological theory, like Marx’s theory, was directly and positively influenced by the Enlightenment. French sociology became rational, empirical, scientific, and change-oriented, but not before it was also shaped by a set of ideas that developed in reaction to the Enlightenment. In Seidman’s view, “The ideology of the counter-Enlightenment represented a virtual inversion of Enlightenment liberalism. In place of modernist premises, we can detect in the Enlightenment critics a strong anti-modernist sentiment” (1983:51). As we will see, sociology in general, and French sociology in particular, have from the beginning been an uncomfortable mix of Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment ideas.

The most extreme form of opposition to Enlightenment ideas was French Catholic counterrevolutionary philosophy, as represented by the ideas of Louis de Bonald (1754–1840) and Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821) (Reedy, 1994; Bradley, 2005a, 2005b). These men were reacting against not only the Enlightenment but also the French Revolution, which they saw partly as a product of the kind of thinking characteristic of the Enlightenment. Bonald, for example, was disturbed by the revolutionary changes and yearned for a return to the peace and harmony of the Middle Ages. In this view, God was the source of society; therefore, reason, which was so important to the Enlightenment philosophers, was seen as inferior to traditional religious beliefs. Furthermore, it was believed that because God had created society, people should not tamper with it and should not try to change a holy creation. By extension, Bonald opposed anything that undermined such traditional institutions as patriarchy, the monogamous family, the monarchy, and the Catholic Church.

Although Bonald represented a rather extreme form of the conservative reaction, his work constitutes a useful introduction to its general premises. The conservatives turned away from what they considered the “naive” rationalism of the Enlightenment. They not only recognized the irrational aspects of social life but also assigned them positive value. Thus they regarded such phenomena as tradition, imagination, emotionalism, and religion as useful and necessary components of social life. In that they disliked upheaval and sought to retain the existing order, they deplored developments such as the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, which they saw as disruptive forces. The conservatives tended to emphasize social order, an emphasis that became one of the central themes of the work of several sociological theorists.

Zeitlin (1996) outlined ten major propositions that he sees as emerging from the conservative reaction and providing the basis for the development of classical French sociological theory.

1. Whereas Enlightenment thinkers tended to emphasize the individual, the conservative reaction led to a major sociological interest in, and emphasis on, society and other large-scale phenomena. Society was viewed as something more than simply an aggregate of individuals. Society was seen as having an existence of its own with its own laws of development and deep roots in the past.
2. Society was the most important unit of analysis; it was seen as more important than the individual. It was society that produced the individual, primarily through the process of socialization.
3. The individual was not even seen as the most basic element within society. A society consisted of such component parts as roles, positions, relationships, structures, and institutions. Individuals were seen as doing little more than filling these units within society.
4. The parts of society were seen as interrelated and interdependent. Indeed, these interrelationships were a major basis of society. This view led to a conservative political orientation. That is, because the parts were held to be interrelated, it followed that tampering with one part could well lead to the undermining of other parts and, ultimately, of the system as a whole. This meant that changes in the social system should be made with extreme care.

5. Change was seen as a threat not only to society and its components but also to the individuals in society. The various components of society were seen as satisfying people's needs. When institutions were disrupted, people were likely to suffer, and their suffering was likely to lead to social disorder.
6. The general tendency was to see the various large-scale components of society as useful for both society and the individuals in it. As a result, there was little desire to look for the negative effects of existing social structures and social institutions.
7. Small units, such as the family, the neighborhood, and religious and occupational groups, also were seen as essential to individuals and society. They provided the intimate, face-to-face environments that people needed in order to survive in modern societies.
8. There was a tendency to see various modern social changes, such as industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization, as having disorganizing effects. These changes were viewed with fear and anxiety, and there was an emphasis on developing ways of dealing with their disruptive effects.
9. While most of these feared changes were leading to a more rational society, the conservative reaction led to an emphasis on the importance of nonrational factors (ritual, ceremony, and worship, for example) in social life.
10. Finally, the conservatives supported the existence of a hierarchical system in society. It was seen as important to society that there be a differential system of status and reward.

These ten propositions, derived from the conservative reaction to the Enlightenment, should be seen as the immediate intellectual basis of the development of sociological theory in France. Many of these ideas made their way into early sociological thought, although some of the Enlightenment ideas (empiricism, for example) were also influential.³

The Development of French Sociology

We turn now to the actual founding of sociology as a distinctive discipline—specifically, to the work of four French thinkers: Alexis de Tocqueville, Claude Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and especially Emile Durkheim.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859)

We begin with Alexis de Tocqueville even though he was born after both Saint-Simon and Comte. We do so because he and his work were such pure products of the Enlightenment (he was strongly and directly influenced by Montesquieu [B. Singer, 2005b], especially his *The Spirit of the Laws* [1748]) and because his work was not part of

³ Although we have emphasized the discontinuities between the Enlightenment and the counter-Enlightenment, Seidman makes the point that there also are continuities and linkages. First, the counter-Enlightenment carried on the scientific tradition developed in the Enlightenment. Second, it picked up the Enlightenment emphasis on collectivities (as opposed to individuals) and greatly extended it. Third, both had an interest in the problems of the modern world, especially its negative effects on individuals.



ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE

A Biographical Sketch

Alexis de Tocqueville was born on July 29, 1805, in Paris. He came from a prominent though not wealthy aristocratic family. The family had suffered during the French Revolution. Tocqueville's parents had been arrested but managed to avoid the guillotine. Tocqueville

was well educated, became a lawyer and judge (although he was not very successful at either), and became well and widely read especially in the Enlightenment philosophy (Rousseau and Montesquieu) that played such a central role in much classical social theory.

The turning point in Tocqueville's life began on April 2, 1831, when he and a friend (Gustave de Beaumont) journeyed to the United States ostensibly to study the American penitentiary system. He saw America as a laboratory in which he could study, in their nascent state, such key phenomena to him as democracy, equality, and freedom. He traveled widely throughout much of the then-developed (and some undeveloped) parts of the United States (and a bit of Canada) getting as far west as Green Bay (Wisconsin) and Memphis (Tennessee) and New Orleans (Louisiana), traveling through large parts of the northeastern, middle Atlantic, and southern states, as well as some midwestern states east of the Mississippi River. He talked to all sorts of people along the way, asked systematic questions, took copious notes, and allowed his interests to evolve on the basis of what he found along the way. Tocqueville (and Beaumont) returned to France on February 20, 1832, having spent less than a year studying the vast physical and social landscape of the United States as it existed then.

It took Tocqueville some time to get started on the first volume of *Democracy in America*, but he began in earnest in late 1833 and the book was published by 1835. It was a great success and made him famous. The irony here is that one of the classic works on democracy in general, and American democracy in particular, was written by a French aristocrat. He launched a political career while putting the finishing touches on volume two of *Democracy*, which appeared in 1840. This volume was more sociological (Aron, 1965) than the first, which was clearly about politics, particularly the American political system and how it compared to other political systems, especially the French

the clear line of development in French social theory from Saint-Simon and Comte to the crucially important Durkheim. Tocqueville has long been seen as a political scientist, not a sociologist, and furthermore many have not perceived the existence of a social theory in his work (e.g., Seidman, 1983:306). However, not only is there a social theory in his work, but it is one that deserves a much more significant place in the history of social theory not only in France but in the rest of the world.

system. (In general, Tocqueville was very favorably disposed to the American system, although he had reservations about democracy more generally.) Volume two was not well received, perhaps because of this shift in orientation, as well as the book's more abstract nature.

Tocqueville continued in politics and, even though he was an aristocrat, was comparatively liberal in many of his views. Of this, he said:

People ascribe to me alternatively aristocratic and democratic prejudices. If I had been born in another period, or in another country, I might have had either one or the other. But my birth, as it happened, made it easy for me to guard against both. I came into the world at the end of a long revolution, which, after destroying ancient institutions, created none that could last. When I entered life, aristocracy was dead and democracy was yet unborn. My instinct, therefore, could not lead me blindly either to the one or the other. (Tocqueville, cited in Nisbet, 1976–1977:61).

It is because of this ambivalence that Nisbet (1976–1977:65) argues that unlike the development of Marxism flowing from Marx's intellectual certainty, "at no time has there been, or is there likely to be, anything called Tocquevilleism."

Tocqueville lived through the Revolution of 1848 and the abdication of the king. However, he opposed the military coup staged by Louis Napoleon, spent a few days in jail, and saw, as a result, the end of his political career (he had become minister of foreign affairs but was fired by Louis Napoleon). He never accepted the dictatorship of Napoleon III and grew increasingly critical of the political direction taken by France. As a way of critiquing the France of his day, Tocqueville decided to write about the French Revolution of 1789 (although he believed it continued through the first half of the nineteenth century and to his day) in his other well-known book, *The Old Regime and the Revolutions*, which was published in 1856. The book focused on French despotism but continued the concerns of *Democracy in America* with the relationship between freedom, equality, and democracy. Unlike the second volume of *Democracy in America*, *Old Regime* was well received and quite successful. It made Tocqueville the "grand old man" of the liberal movement of the day in France.

Tocqueville died at age 53 on April 16, 1859 (Mancini, 1994; Zunz and Kahan, 2002). One can gain a great deal of insight into the man and his thinking through *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Tocqueville, 1893/1959), his posthumously published memoirs of the Revolution of 1848 and his role in it.

Tocqueville is best known for the legendary and highly influential *Democracy in America* (1835/1840/1969), especially the first volume, which deals, in a very laudatory way, with the early American democratic system and came to be seen as an early contribution to the development of "political science." However, in the later volumes of that work, as well as in later works, Tocqueville clearly develops a broad social theory that deserves a place in the canon of social theory.

Three interrelated issues lie at the heart of Tocqueville's theory. As a product of the Enlightenment, he is first and foremost a great supporter of, and advocate for, *freedom*. However, he is much more critical of *equality*, which he sees as tending to produce mediocrity in comparison to the higher-quality outcomes associated with the aristocrats (he himself was an aristocrat) of a prior, more inegalitarian, era. More important, equality and mediocrity are also linked to what most concerns him, and that is the growth of *centralization*, especially in the government, and the threat centralized government poses to freedom. In his view, it was the inequality of the prior age, the power of the aristocrats, that acted to keep government centralization in check. However, with the demise of aristocrats, and the rise of greater equality, there are no groups capable of countering the ever-present tendency toward centralization. The mass of largely equal people are too "servile" to oppose this trend. Furthermore, Tocqueville links equality to "individualism" (an important concept that he claimed to "invent" and for which he is credited), and the resulting individualists are far less interested in the well-being of the larger "community" than were the aristocrats who preceded them.

It is for this reason that Tocqueville is critical of democracy and especially socialism. Democracy's commitment to freedom was ultimately threatened by its parallel commitment to equality and its tendency toward centralized government. Of course, from Tocqueville's point of view the situation would be far worse in socialism because its far greater commitment to equality, and the much greater likelihood of government centralization, posed a far greater threat to freedom. The latter view is quite prescient given what transpired in the Soviet Union and other societies that operated, at least in name, under the banner of socialism.

Thus, the strength of Tocqueville's theory lies in the interrelated ideas of freedom, equality, and especially centralization. His "grand narrative" on the increasing control of central governments anticipates other theories including Weber's work on bureaucracy and especially the more contemporary work of Michel Foucault on "governmentality" and its gradual spread, increasing subtlety, and propensity to invade even the "soul" of the people controlled by it. There is a very profound social theory in Tocqueville's work, but it had no influence on the theories and theorists to be discussed in the remainder of this section on French social theory. Its influence was largely restricted to the development of political science and to work on American democracy and the French Revolution (Tocqueville, 1856/1983). There are certainly sociologists (and other social scientists) who recognized his importance, especially those interested in the relationship between individualism and community (Bellah et al., 1985; Nisbet, 1953; Putnam, 2001; Riesman, 1950), but to this day Tocqueville's theories have not been accorded the place they deserve in social theory in general, and even in French social theory (Gane, 2003).

Claude Henri Saint-Simon (1760–1825)

Saint-Simon was older than Auguste Comte (see next page), and in fact Comte, in his early years, served as Saint-Simon's secretary and disciple. There is a very strong similarity between the ideas of these two thinkers, yet a bitter debate developed between them that led to their eventual split (Pickering, 1993; K. Thompson, 1975).

The most interesting aspect of Saint-Simon was his significance to the development of *both* conservative (like Comte's) and radical Marxian theory. On the conservative side, Saint-Simon wanted to preserve society as it was, but he did not seek a return to life as it had been in the Middle Ages, as did Bonald and Maistre. In addition, he was a *positivist* (Durkheim, 1928/1962:142), which meant that he believed that the study of social phenomena should employ the same scientific techniques that were used in the natural sciences. On the radical side, Saint-Simon saw the need for socialist reforms, especially the centralized planning of the economic system. But Saint-Simon did not go nearly as far as Marx did later. Although he, like Marx, saw the capitalists superseding the feudal nobility, he felt it inconceivable that the working class would come to replace the capitalists. Many of Saint-Simon's ideas are found in Comte's work, but Comte developed them in a more systematic fashion (Pickering, 1997).

Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

Comte was the first to use the term *sociology* (Pickering, 2000; J. Turner, 2001a).⁴ He had an enormous influence on later sociological theorists (especially Herbert Spencer and Emile Durkheim). And he believed that the study of sociology should be scientific, just as many classical theorists did and most contemporary sociologists do (Lenzer, 1975).

Comte was greatly disturbed by the anarchy that pervaded French society and was critical of those thinkers who had spawned both the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He developed his scientific view, "positivism," or "positive philosophy," to combat what he considered to be the negative and destructive philosophy of the Enlightenment. Comte was in line with, and influenced by, the French counterrevolutionary Catholics (especially Bonald and Maistre). However, his work can be set apart from theirs on at least two grounds. First, he did not think it possible to return to the Middle Ages; advances in science and industry made that impossible. Second, he developed a much more sophisticated theoretical system than his predecessors, one that was adequate to shape a good portion of early sociology.

Comte developed *social physics*, or what in 1839 he called *sociology* (Pickering, 2000). The use of the term *social physics* made it clear that Comte sought to model sociology after the "hard sciences." This new science, which in his view would ultimately become *the* dominant science, was to be concerned with both social statics (existing social structures) and social dynamics (social change). Although both involved the search for laws of social life, he felt that social dynamics was more important than social statics. This focus on change reflected his interest in social reform, particularly reform of the ills created by the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. Comte did not urge revolutionary change, because he felt the natural evolution of society would make things better. Reforms were needed only to assist the process a bit.

⁴ While he recognizes that Comte created the label "sociology," Eriksson (1993) has challenged the idea that Comte is the progenitor of modern, scientific sociology. Rather, Eriksson sees people like Adam Smith, and more generally the Scottish Moralists as the true source of modern sociology. See also L. Hill (1996) on the importance of Adam Ferguson, Ullmann-Margalit (1997) on Ferguson and Adam Smith, and Rundell (2001).



AUGUSTE COMTE

A Biographical Sketch

Auguste Comte was born in Montpellier, France, on January 19, 1798 (Pickering, 1993:7; Wernick, 2005; Orenstein, 2007). His parents were middle class, and his father eventually rose to the position of official local agent for the tax collector. Although a precocious student, Comte

never received a college-level degree. He and his whole class were dismissed from the Ecole Polytechnique for their rebelliousness and their political ideas. This expulsion had an adverse effect on Comte's academic career. In 1817 he became secretary (and "adopted son" [Manuel, 1962:251]) to Claude Henri Saint-Simon, a philosopher forty years Comte's senior. They worked closely together for several years, and Comte acknowledged his great debt to Saint-Simon: "I certainly owe a great deal intellectually to Saint-Simon . . . he contributed powerfully to launching me in the philosophic direction that I clearly created for myself today and which I will follow without hesitation all my life" (Durkheim, 1928/1962:144). But in 1824 they had a falling-out because Comte believed that Saint-Simon wanted to omit Comte's name from one of his contributions. Comte later wrote of his relationship with Saint-Simon as "catastrophic" (Pickering, 1993:238) and described him as a "depraved juggler" (Durkheim, 1928/1962:144). In 1852, Comte said of Saint-Simon, "I owed nothing to this personage" (Pickering, 1993:240).

Heilbron (1995) describes Comte as short (perhaps 5 feet, 2 inches), a bit cross-eyed, and very insecure in social situations, especially ones involving women. He was also alienated from society as a whole. These facts may help account for the fact that Comte married Caroline Massin (the marriage lasted from 1825 to 1842). She was an illegitimate child whom Comte later called a "prostitute," although that label has been questioned recently (Pickering, 1997:37). Comte's personal insecurities stood in contrast to his great security about his own intellectual capacities, and it appears that his self-esteem was well founded:

Comte's prodigious memory is famous. Endowed with a photographic memory he could recite backwards the words of any page he had read but once. His powers of concentration were such that he could sketch out an entire

This leads us to the cornerstone of Comte's approach—his evolutionary theory, or the *law of the three stages*. The theory proposes that there are three intellectual stages through which the world has gone throughout its history. According to Comte, not only does the world go through this process, but groups, societies, sciences, individuals, and even minds go through the same three stages. The *theological stage* is

book without putting pen to paper. His lectures were all delivered without notes. When he sat down to write out his books he wrote everything from memory.

(Schweber, 1991:134)

In 1826, Comte concocted a scheme by which he would present a series of seventy-two public lectures (to be held in his apartment) on his philosophy. The course drew a distinguished audience, but it was halted after three lectures when Comte suffered a nervous breakdown. He continued to suffer from mental problems, and once in 1827 he tried (unsuccessfully) to commit suicide by throwing himself into the Seine River.

Although he could not get a regular position at the Ecole Polytechnique, Comte did get a minor position as a teaching assistant there in 1832. In 1837, Comte was given the additional post of admissions examiner, and this, for the first time, gave him an adequate income (he had often been economically dependent on his family until this time). During this period, Comte worked on the six-volume work for which he is best known, *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, which was finally published in its entirety in 1842 (the first volume had been published in 1830). In that work Comte outlined his view that sociology was the ultimate science. He also attacked the Ecole Polytechnique, and the result was that in 1844 his assistantship there was not renewed. By 1851 he had completed the four-volume *Systeme de Politique Positive*, which had a more practical intent, offering a grand plan for the reorganization of society.

Heilbron argues that a major break took place in Comte's life in 1838 and it was then that he lost hope that anyone would take his work on science in general, and sociology in particular, seriously. It was also at that point that he embarked on his life of "cerebral hygiene"; that is, Comte began to avoid reading the work of other people, with the result that he became hopelessly out of touch with recent intellectual developments. It was after 1838 that he began developing his bizarre ideas about reforming society that found expression in *Systeme de Politique Positive*. Comte came to fancy himself as the high priest of a new religion of humanity; he believed in a world that eventually would be led by sociologist-priests. (Comte had been strongly influenced by his Catholic background.) Interestingly, in spite of such outrageous ideas, Comte eventually developed a considerable following in France, as well as in a number of other countries.

Auguste Comte died on September 5, 1857.

the first, and it characterized the world prior to 1300. During this period, the major idea system emphasized the belief that supernatural powers and religious figures, modeled after humankind, are at the root of everything. In particular, the social and physical world is seen as produced by God. The second stage is the *metaphysical* stage, which occurred roughly between 1300 and 1800. This era was characterized by

the belief that abstract forces like “nature,” rather than personalized gods, explain virtually everything. Finally, in 1800 the world entered the *positivistic* stage, characterized by belief in science. People now tended to give up the search for absolute causes (God or nature) and concentrated instead on observation of the social and physical world in the search for the laws governing them.

It is clear that in his theory of the world Comte focused on intellectual factors. Indeed, he argued that intellectual disorder is the cause of social disorder. The disorder stemmed from earlier idea systems (theological and metaphysical) that continued to exist in the positivistic (scientific) age. Only when positivism gained total control would social upheavals cease. Because this was an evolutionary process, there was no need to foment social upheaval and revolution. Positivism would come, although perhaps not as quickly as some would like. Here Comte’s social reformism and his sociology coincide. Sociology could expedite the arrival of positivism and hence bring order to the social world. Above all, Comte did not want to seem to be espousing revolution. There was, in his view, enough disorder in the world. In any case, from Comte’s point of view, it was intellectual change that was needed, and so there was little reason for social and political revolution.

We have already encountered several of Comte’s positions that were to be of great significance to the development of classical sociology—his basic conservatism, reformism, and scientism and his evolutionary view of the world. Several other aspects of his work deserve mention because they also were to play a major role in the development of sociological theory. For example, his sociology does not focus on the individual but rather takes as its basic unit of analysis larger entities such as the family. He also urged that we look at both social structure and social change. Of great importance to later sociological theory, especially the work of Spencer and Parsons, is Comte’s stress on the systematic character of society—the links among and between the various components of society. He also accorded great importance to the role of consensus in society. He saw little merit in the idea that society is characterized by inevitable conflict between workers and capitalists. In addition, Comte emphasized the need to engage in abstract theorizing and to go out and do sociological research. He urged that sociologists use observation, experimentation, and comparative historical analysis. Finally, Comte believed that sociology ultimately would become the dominant scientific force in the world because of its distinctive ability to interpret social laws and to develop reforms aimed at patching up problems within the system.

Comte was in the forefront of the development of positivistic sociology (Bryant, 1985; Halfpenny, 1982). To Jonathan Turner, Comte’s positivism emphasized that “the social universe is amenable to the development of abstract laws that can be tested through the careful collection of data,” and “these abstract laws will denote the basic and generic properties of the social universe and they will specify their ‘natural relations’” (1985:24). As we will see, a number of classical theorists (especially Spencer and Durkheim) shared Comte’s interest in the discovery of the laws of social life. While positivism remains important in contemporary sociology, it has come under attack from a number of quarters (Morrow, 1994).

Even though Comte lacked a solid academic base on which to build a school of Comtian sociological theory, he nevertheless laid a basis for the development of a

significant stream of sociological theory. But his long-term significance is dwarfed by that of his successor in French sociology and the inheritor of a number of its ideas, Emile Durkheim. (For a debate over the canonization of Durkheim, as well as other classical theorists discussed in this chapter, see D. Parker, 1997; Mouzelis, 1997.)

Emile Durkheim (1858–1917)

Durkheim's relation to the Enlightenment was much more ambiguous than Comte's. Durkheim has been seen as an inheritor of the Enlightenment tradition because of his emphasis on science and social reformism. However, he also has been seen as the inheritor of the conservative tradition, especially as it was manifested in Comte's work. But whereas Comte had remained outside of academia (as had Tocqueville), Durkheim developed an increasingly solid academic base as his career progressed. Durkheim legitimized sociology in France, and his work ultimately became a dominant force in the development of sociology in general and of sociological theory in particular (Rawls, 2007; R. Jones, 2000).

Durkheim was politically liberal, but he took a more conservative position intellectually. Like Comte and the Catholic counterrevolutionaries, Durkheim feared and hated social disorder. His work was informed by the disorders produced by the general social changes discussed earlier in this chapter, as well as by others (such as industrial strikes, disruption of the ruling class, church-state discord, the rise of political anti-Semitism) more specific to the France of Durkheim's time (Karady, 1983). In fact, most of his work was devoted to the study of social order. His view was that social disorders are not a necessary part of the modern world and could be reduced by social reforms. Whereas Marx saw the problems of the modern world as inherent in society, Durkheim (along with most other classical theorists) did not. As a result, Marx's ideas on the need for social revolution stood in sharp contrast to the reformism of Durkheim and the others. As classical sociological theory developed, it was the Durkheimian interest in order and reform that came to dominate, while the Marxian position was eclipsed.

Social Facts

Durkheim developed a distinctive conception of the subject matter of sociology and then tested it in an empirical study. In *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1982), Durkheim argued that it is the special task of sociology to study what he called *social facts* (Nielsen, 2005a, 2007a). He conceived of social facts as forces (Takla and Pope, 1985) and structures that are external to, and coercive of, the individual. The study of these large-scale structures and forces—for example, institutionalized law and shared moral beliefs—and their impact on people became the concern of many later sociological theorists (Parsons, for example). In *Suicide* (1897/1951), Durkheim reasoned that if he could link such an individual behavior as suicide to social causes (social facts), he would have made a persuasive case for the importance of the discipline of sociology. But Durkheim did not examine why individual *A* or *B* committed suicide; rather, he was interested in the causes of differences in suicide rates among groups, regions, countries, and different categories of people (for example, married and single). His basic argument

was that it was the nature of, and changes in, social facts that led to differences in suicide rates. For example, a war or an economic depression would create a collective mood of depression that would in turn lead to increases in suicide rates. More will be said on this subject in Chapter 3, but the key point is that Durkheim developed a distinctive view of sociology and sought to demonstrate its usefulness in a scientific study of suicide.

In *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1982), Durkheim differentiated between two types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. Although he dealt with both in the course of his work, his main focus was on *nonmaterial social facts* (for example, culture, social institutions) rather than *material social facts* (for example, bureaucracy, law). This concern for nonmaterial social facts was already clear in his earliest major work, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1964). His focus there was a comparative analysis of what held society together in the primitive and modern cases. He concluded that earlier societies were held together primarily by nonmaterial social facts, specifically, a strongly held common morality, or what he called a strong *collective conscience*. However, because of the complexities of modern society, there had been a decline in the strength of the collective conscience. The primary bond in the modern world was an intricate division of labor, which tied people to others in dependency relationships. However, Durkheim felt that the modern division of labor brought with it several “pathologies”; it was, in other words, an inadequate method of holding society together. Given his conservative sociology, Durkheim did not feel that revolution was needed to solve these problems. Rather, he suggested a variety of reforms that could “patch up” the modern system and keep it functioning. Although he recognized that there was no going back to the age when a powerful collective conscience predominated, he did feel that the common morality could be strengthened in modern society and that people thereby could cope better with the pathologies that they were experiencing.

Religion

In his later work, nonmaterial social facts occupied an even more central position. In fact, he came to focus on perhaps the ultimate form of a nonmaterial social fact—religion—in his last major work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912/1965). Durkheim examined primitive society in order to find the roots of religion. He believed that he would be better able to find those roots in the comparative simplicity of primitive society than in the complexity of the modern world. What he found, he felt, was that the source of religion was society itself. Society comes to define certain things as religious and others as profane. Specifically, in the case he studied, the clan was the source of a primitive kind of religion, *totemism*, in which things like plants and animals are deified. Totemism, in turn, was seen as a specific type of nonmaterial social fact, a form of the collective conscience. In the end, Durkheim came to argue that society and religion (or, more generally, the collective conscience) were one and the same. Religion was the way society expressed itself in the form of a nonmaterial social fact. In a sense, then, Durkheim came to deify society and its major products. Clearly, in deifying society, Durkheim took a highly conservative stance: one would not want to overturn a deity *or* its societal source.

Because he identified society with God, Durkheim was not inclined to urge social revolution. Instead, he was a social reformer seeking ways of improving the functioning of society. In these and other ways, Durkheim was clearly in line with French conservative sociology. The fact that he avoided many of its excesses helped make him the most significant figure in French sociology.

These books and other important works helped carve out a distinctive domain for sociology in the academic world of turn-of-the-century France, and they earned Durkheim the leading position in that growing field. In 1898, Durkheim set up a scholarly journal devoted to sociology, *L'année sociologique* (Besnard, 1983). It became a powerful force in the development and spread of sociological ideas. Durkheim was intent on fostering the growth of sociology, and he used his journal as a focal point for the development of a group of disciples. They later would extend his ideas and carry them to many other locales and into the study of other aspects of the social world (for example, sociology of law and sociology of the city) (Besnard, 1983:1). By 1910, Durkheim had established a strong center of sociology in France, and the academic institutionalization of sociology was well under way in that nation (Heilbron, 1995).

The Development of German Sociology

Whereas the early history of French sociology is a fairly coherent story of the progression from the Enlightenment and the French Revolution to the conservative reaction and to the increasingly important sociological ideas of Tocqueville, Saint-Simon, Comte, and Durkheim, German sociology was fragmented from the beginning. A split developed between Marx (and his supporters), who remained on the edge of sociology, and the early giants of mainstream German sociology, Max Weber and Georg Simmel.⁵ However, although Marxian theory itself was deemed unacceptable, its ideas found their way in a variety of positive and negative ways into mainstream German sociology.

The Roots and Nature of the Theories of Karl Marx (1818–1883)

The dominant intellectual influence on Karl Marx was the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1770–1831).

Hegel

According to Terence Ball, “it is difficult for us to appreciate the degree to which Hegel dominated German thought in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It was largely within the framework of his philosophy that educated Germans—including the young Marx—discussed history, politics and culture” (1991:25). Marx’s education at the University of Berlin was shaped by Hegel’s ideas as well as by the split that developed

⁵ For an argument against this and the view of continuity between Marxian and mainstream sociology, see Seidman (1983).

among Hegel's followers after his death. The "Old Hegelians" continued to subscribe to the master's ideas, while the "Young Hegelians," although still working in the Hegelian tradition, were critical of many facets of his philosophical system.

Two concepts represent the essence of Hegel's philosophy—the dialectic and idealism (Beamish, 2007a; Hegel, 1807/1967, 1821/1967). The *dialectic* is both a way of thinking and an image of the world. On the one hand, it is a way of thinking that stresses the importance of processes, relations, dynamics, conflicts, and contradictions—a dynamic rather than a static way of thinking about the world. On the other hand, it is a view that the world is made up not of static structures but of processes, relationships, dynamics, conflicts, and contradictions. Although the dialectic generally is associated with Hegel, it certainly predates him in philosophy. Marx, trained in the Hegelian tradition, accepted the significance of the dialectic. However, he was critical of some aspects of the way Hegel used it. For example, Hegel tended to apply the dialectic only to ideas, whereas Marx felt that it applied as well to more material aspects of life, for example, the economy.

Hegel is also associated with the philosophy of *idealism* (Kleiner, 2005), which emphasizes the importance of the mind and mental products rather than the material world. It is the social definition of the physical and material worlds that matters most, not those worlds themselves. In its extreme form, idealism asserts that *only* the mind and psychological constructs exist. Some idealists believed that their mental processes would remain the same even if the physical and social worlds no longer existed. Idealists emphasize not only mental processes but also the ideas produced by these processes. Hegel paid a great deal of attention to the development of such ideas, especially to what he referred to as the "spirit" of society.

In fact, Hegel offered a kind of evolutionary theory of the world in idealistic terms. At first, people were endowed only with the ability to acquire a sensory understanding of the world around them. They could understand things like the sight, smell, and feel of the social and physical world. Later, people developed the ability to be conscious of, to understand, themselves. With self-knowledge and self-understanding, people began to understand that they could become more than they were. In terms of Hegel's dialectical approach, a contradiction developed between what people were and what they felt they could be. The resolution of this contradiction lay in the development of an individual's awareness of his or her place in the larger spirit of society. Individuals come to realize that their ultimate fulfillment lies in the development and the expansion of the spirit of society as a whole. Thus, in Hegel's scheme, individuals evolve from an understanding of things to an understanding of self to an understanding of their place in the larger scheme of things.

Hegel, then, offered a general theory of the evolution of the world. It is a subjective theory in which change is held to occur at the level of consciousness. However, that change occurs largely beyond the control of actors. Actors are reduced to little more than vessels swept along by the inevitable evolution of consciousness.

Feuerbach

Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) was an important bridge between Hegel and Marx (Staples, 2007a). As a Young Hegelian, Feuerbach was critical of Hegel for, among other

things, his excessive emphasis on consciousness and the spirit of society. Feuerbach's adoption of a materialist philosophy led him to argue that what was needed was to move from Hegel's subjective idealism to a focus not on ideas but on the material reality of real human beings. In his critique of Hegel, Feuerbach focused on religion. To Feuerbach, God is simply a projection by people of their human essence onto an impersonal force. People set God over and above themselves, with the result that they become alienated from God and project a series of positive characteristics onto God (that he is perfect, almighty, and holy), while they reduce themselves to being imperfect, powerless, and sinful. Feuerbach argued that this kind of religion must be overcome and that its defeat could be aided by a materialist philosophy in which people (not religion) became their own highest object, ends in themselves. Real people, not abstract ideas like religion, are deified by a materialist philosophy.

Marx, Hegel, and Feuerbach

Marx was simultaneously influenced by, and critical of, *both* Hegel and Feuerbach. Marx, following Feuerbach, was critical of Hegel's adherence to an idealist philosophy. Marx took this position not only because of his adoption of a materialist orientation but also because of his interest in practical activities. Social facts like wealth and the state are treated by Hegel as ideas rather than as real, material entities. Even when he examined a seemingly material process like labor, Hegel was looking only at abstract mental labor. This is very different from Marx's interest in the labor of real, sentient people. Thus Hegel was looking at the wrong issues as far as Marx was concerned. In addition, Marx felt that Hegel's idealism led to a very conservative political orientation. To Hegel, the process of evolution was occurring beyond the control of people and their activities. In any case, in that people seemed to be moving toward greater consciousness of the world as it could be, there seemed no need for any revolutionary change; the process was already moving in the "desired" direction. Whatever problems did exist lay in consciousness, and the answer therefore seemed to lie in changing thinking.

Marx took a very different position, arguing that the problems of modern life can be traced to real, material sources (for example, the structures of capitalism) and that the solutions, therefore, can be found only in the overturning of those structures by the collective action of large numbers of people (Marx and Engels, 1845/1956:254). Whereas Hegel "stood the world on its head" (that is, focused on consciousness, not the real material world), Marx firmly embedded his dialectic in a material base.

Marx applauded Feuerbach's critique of Hegel on a number of counts (for example, its materialism and its rejection of the abstractness of Hegel's theory), but he was far from fully satisfied with Feuerbach's position (Thomson, 1994). For one thing, Feuerbach focused on the religious world, whereas Marx believed that it was the entire social world, and the economy in particular, that had to be analyzed. Although Marx accepted Feuerbach's materialism, he felt that Feuerbach had gone too far in focusing onesidedly, nondialectically, on the material world. Feuerbach failed to include the most important of Hegel's contributions, the dialectic, in his materialist orientation, particularly the relationship between people and the material world. Finally, Marx argued that Feuerbach, like most philosophers, failed to emphasize *praxis*—practical activity—in

particular, revolutionary activity (Wortmann, 2007). As Marx put it, “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it” (cited in Tucker, 1970:109).

Marx extracted what he considered to be the two most important elements from these two thinkers—Hegel’s dialectic and Feuerbach’s materialism—and fused them into his own distinctive orientation, *dialectical materialism*,⁶ which focuses on dialectical relationships within the material world.

Political Economy

Marx’s materialism and his consequent focus on the economic sector led him rather naturally to the work of a group of *political economists* (for example, Adam Smith and David Ricardo) (Howard and King, 2005). Marx was very attracted to a number of their positions. He lauded their basic premise that labor was the source of all wealth. This ultimately led Marx to his *labor theory of value*, in which he argued that the profit of the capitalist was based on the exploitation of the laborer. Capitalists performed the rather simple trick of paying the workers less than they deserved, because they received less pay than the value of what they actually produced in a work period. This *surplus value*, which was retained and reinvested by the capitalist, was the basis of the entire capitalist system. The capitalist system grew by continually increasing the level of exploitation of the workers (and therefore the amount of surplus value) and investing the profits for the expansion of the system.

Marx also was affected by the political economists’ depiction of the horrors of the capitalist system and the exploitation of the workers. However, whereas they depicted the evils of capitalism, Marx criticized the political economists for seeing these evils as inevitable components of capitalism. Marx deplored their general acceptance of capitalism and the way they urged people to work for economic success within it. He also was critical of the political economists for failing to see the inherent conflict between capitalists and laborers and for denying the need for a radical change in the economic order. Such conservative economics was hard for Marx to accept, given his commitment to a radical change from capitalism to socialism.

Marx and Sociology

Marx was not a sociologist and did not consider himself one. Although his work is too broad to be encompassed by the term *sociology*, there is a sociological theory to be found in Marx’s work. From the beginning, there were those who were heavily influenced by Marx, and there has been a continuous strand of Marxian sociology, primarily in Europe. But for the majority of early sociologists, his work was a negative force, something against which to shape their sociology. Until very recently, sociological theory, especially in America, has been characterized by either hostility to or ignorance of Marxian theory. This has, as we will see in Chapter 6, changed dramatically, but the negative reaction to Marx’s work was a major force in the shaping of much of sociological theory (Gurney, 1981).

⁶ First used by Joseph Dietzgen in 1887, the term was made central by Georgi Plekhanov in 1891 (Beamish, 2007a). Although Marx certainly operated from the perspective of dialectical materialism, he never used the concept.

The basic reason for this rejection of Marx was ideological. Many of the early sociological theorists were inheritors of the conservative reaction to the disruptions of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Marx's radical ideas and the radical social changes he foretold and sought to bring to life were clearly feared and hated by such thinkers. Marx was dismissed as an ideologist. It was argued that he was not a serious sociological theorist. However, ideology per se could not have been the real reason for the rejection of Marx, because the work of Comte, Durkheim, and other conservative thinkers also was heavily ideological. It was the nature of the ideology, not the existence of ideology as such, that put off many sociological theorists. They were ready and eager to buy conservative ideology wrapped in a cloak of sociological theory, but not the radical ideology offered by Marx and his followers.

There were, of course, other reasons why Marx was not accepted by many early theorists. He seemed to be more an economist than a sociologist. Although the early sociologists would certainly admit the importance of the economy, they would also argue that it was only one of a number of components of social life.

Another reason for the early rejection of Marx was the nature of his interests. Whereas the early sociologists were reacting to the disorder created by the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and later the Industrial Revolution, Marx was not upset by these disorders—or by disorder in general. Rather, what interested and concerned Marx most was the oppressiveness of the capitalist system that was emerging out of the Industrial Revolution. Marx wanted to develop a theory that explained this oppressiveness and that would help overthrow that system. Marx's interest was in revolution, which stood in contrast to the conservative concern for reform and orderly change.

Another difference worth noting is the difference in philosophical roots between Marxian and conservative sociological theory. Most of the conservative theorists were heavily influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Among other things, this led them to think in linear, cause-and-effect terms. That is, they tended to argue that a change in *A* (say, the change in ideas during the Enlightenment) leads to a change in *B* (say, the political changes of the French Revolution). In contrast, Marx was most heavily influenced, as we have seen, by Hegel, who thought in dialectical rather than cause-and-effect terms. Among other things, the dialectic attunes us to the ongoing reciprocal effects of social forces. Thus, a dialectician would reconceptualize the example discussed above as a continual, ongoing interplay of ideas and politics.

Marx's Theory

To oversimplify enormously (see Chapter 2 for a much more detailed discussion), Marx offered a theory of capitalist society based on his image of the basic nature of human beings. Marx believed that people are basically productive; that is, in order to survive, people need to work in, and with, nature. In so doing, they produce the food, clothing, tools, shelter, and other necessities that permit them to live. Their productivity is a perfectly natural way by which they express basic creative impulses. Furthermore, these impulses are expressed in concert with other people; in other words, people are inherently social. They need to work together to produce what they need to survive.

Throughout history this natural process has been subverted, at first by the mean conditions of primitive society and later by a variety of structural arrangements erected by societies in the course of history. In various ways, these structures interfered with the natural productive process. However, it is in capitalist society that this breakdown is most acute; the breakdown in the natural productive process reaches its culmination in capitalism.

Basically capitalism is a structure (or, more accurately, a series of structures) that erects barriers between an individual and the production process, the products of that process, and other people; ultimately, it even divides the individual himself or herself. This is the basic meaning of the concept of *alienation*: it is the breakdown of the natural interconnection among people and what they produce. Alienation occurs because capitalism has evolved into a two-class system in which a few capitalists own the production process, the products, and the labor time of those who work for them. Instead of naturally producing for themselves, people produce unnaturally in capitalist society for a small group of capitalists. Intellectually, Marx was very concerned with the structures of capitalism and their oppressive impact on actors. Politically, he was led to an interest in emancipating people from the oppressive structures of capitalism.

Marx actually spent very little time dreaming about what a utopian socialist state would look like (Lovell, 1992). He was more concerned with helping to bring about the demise of capitalism. He believed that the contradictions and conflicts within capitalism would lead dialectically to its ultimate collapse, but he did not think that the process was inevitable. People had to act at the appropriate times and in the appropriate ways for socialism to come into being. The capitalists had great resources at their disposal to forestall the coming of socialism, but they could be overcome by the concerted action of a class-conscious proletariat. What would the proletariat create in the process? What is socialism? Most basically, it is a society in which, for the first time, people could approach Marx's ideal image of productivity. With the aid of modern technology, people could interact harmoniously with nature and other people to create what they needed to survive. To put it another way, in socialist society, people would no longer be alienated.

The Roots and Nature of the Theories of Max Weber (1864–1920) and Georg Simmel (1858–1918)

Although Marx and his followers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remained outside mainstream German sociology, to a considerable extent early German sociology can be seen as developing in opposition to Marxian theory.

Weber and Marx

Albert Salomon, for example, claimed that a large part of the theory of the early giant of German sociology, Max Weber, developed “in a long and intense debate with the ghost of Marx” (1945:596). This is probably an exaggeration, but in many ways Marxian theory did play a negative role in Weberian theory. In other ways, however, Weber was working within the Marxian tradition, trying to “round out” Marx's theory. Also, there were many inputs into Weberian theory other than Marxian theory (Burger,

1976). We can clarify a good deal about the sources of German sociology by outlining each of these views of the relationship between Marx and Weber (Antonio and Glassman, 1985; Schroeter, 1985). It should be borne in mind that Weber was not intimately familiar with Marx's work (much of it was not published until after Weber's death) and that Weber was reacting more to the work of the Marxists than to Marx's work itself (Antonio, 1985:29; B. Turner, 1981:19–20).

Weber *did* tend to view Marx and the Marxists of his day as economic determinists who offered single-cause theories of social life. That is, Marxian theory was seen as tracing all historical developments to economic bases and viewing all contemporaneous structures as erected on an economic base. Although this is not true of Marx's own theory (as we will see in Chapter 2), it was the position of many later Marxists.

One of the examples of economic determinism that seemed to rankle Weber most was the view that ideas are simply the reflections of material (especially economic) interests, that material interests determine ideology. From this point of view, Weber was supposed to have "turned Marx on his head" (much as Marx had inverted Hegel). Instead of focusing on economic factors and their effect on ideas, Weber devoted much of his attention to ideas and their effect on the economy. Rather than seeing ideas as simple reflections of economic factors, Weber saw them as fairly autonomous forces capable of profoundly affecting the economic world. Weber certainly devoted a lot of attention to ideas, particularly systems of religious ideas, and he was especially concerned with the impact of religious ideas on the economy. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905/1958), he was concerned with Protestantism, mainly as a system of ideas, and its impact on the rise of another system of ideas, the "spirit of capitalism," and ultimately on a capitalist economic system. Weber had a similar interest in other world religions, looking at how their nature might have obstructed the development of capitalism in their respective societies. On the basis of this kind of work, some scholars came to the conclusion that Weber developed his ideas in opposition to those of Marx.

A second view of Weber's relationship to Marx, as mentioned earlier, is that he did not so much oppose Marx as try to round out Marx's theoretical perspective. Here Weber is seen as working more within the Marxian tradition than in opposition to it. His work on religion, interpreted from this point of view, was simply an effort to show that not only do material factors affect ideas but ideas themselves affect material structures.

A good example of the view that Weber was engaged in a process of rounding out Marxian theory is in the area of stratification theory. In this work on stratification, Marx focused on social *class*, the economic dimension of stratification. Although Weber accepted the importance of this factor, he argued that other dimensions of stratification were also important. He argued that the notion of social stratification should be extended to include stratification on the basis of prestige (*status*) and *power*. The inclusion of these other dimensions does not constitute a refutation of Marx but is simply an extension of his ideas.

Both of the views outlined above accept the importance of Marxian theory for Weber. There are elements of truth in both positions; at some points Weber was

working in opposition to Marx, while at other points he was extending Marx's ideas. However, a third view of this issue may best characterize the relationship between Marx and Weber. In this view, Marx is simply seen as only one of many influences on Weber's thought.

Other Influences on Weber

We can identify a number of sources of Weberian theory, including German historians, philosophers, economists, and political theorists. Among those who influenced Weber, the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) stands out above all the others. But we must not overlook the impact of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) (Antonio, 2001)—especially his emphasis on the hero—on Weber's work on the need for individuals to stand up to the impact of bureaucracies and other structures of modern society.

The influence of Immanuel Kant on Weber and on German sociology generally shows that German sociology and Marxism grew from different philosophical roots. As we have seen, it was Hegel, not Kant, who was the important philosophical influence on Marxian theory. Whereas Hegel's philosophy led Marx and the Marxists to look for relations, conflicts, and contradictions, Kantian philosophy led at least some German sociologists to take a more static perspective. To Kant the world was a buzzing confusion of events that could never be known directly. The world could be known only through thought processes that filter, select, and categorize these events. The content of the real world was differentiated by Kant from the forms through which that content can be comprehended. The emphasis on these forms gave the work of those sociologists within the Kantian tradition a more static quality than that of the Marxists within the Hegelian tradition.

Weber's Theory

Whereas Karl Marx offered basically a theory of capitalism, Weber's work was fundamentally a theory of the process of rationalization (Brubaker, 1984; Kalberg, 1980, 1990, 1994). Weber was interested in the general issue of why institutions in the Western world had grown progressively more rational while powerful barriers seemed to prevent a similar development in the rest of the world.

Although rationality is used in many different ways in Weber's work, what interests us here is a process involving one of four types identified by Kalberg (1980, 1990, 1994; see also Brubaker, 1984; D. Levine, 1981a), *formal rationality*. Formal rationality involves, as was usually the case with Weber, a concern for the actor making choices of means and ends. However, in this case, that choice is made in reference to universally applied rules, regulations, and laws. These, in turn, are derived from various large-scale structures, especially bureaucracies and the economy. Weber developed his theories in the context of a large number of comparative historical studies of the West, China, India, and many other regions of the world. In those studies, he sought to delineate the factors that helped bring about or impede the development of rationalization.

Weber saw the bureaucracy (and the historical process of bureaucratization) as the classic example of rationalization, but rationalization is perhaps best illustrated

today by the fast-food restaurant (Ritzer, 2008b). The fast-food restaurant is a formally rational system in which people (both workers and customers) are led to seek the most rational means to ends. The drive-through window, for example, is a rational means by which workers can dispense, and customers can obtain, food quickly and efficiently. Speed and efficiency are dictated by the fast-food restaurants and the rules and regulations by which they operate.

Weber embedded his discussion of the process of bureaucratization in a broader discussion of the political institution. He differentiated among three types of authority systems—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. Only in the modern Western world can a rational-legal authority system develop, and only within that system does one find the full-scale development of the modern bureaucracy. The rest of the world remains dominated by traditional or charismatic authority systems, which generally impede the development of a rational-legal authority system and modern bureaucracies. Briefly, *traditional* authority stems from a long-lasting system of beliefs. An example would be a leader who comes to power because his or her family or clan has always provided the group's leadership. A *charismatic* leader derives his or her authority from extraordinary abilities or characteristics, or more likely simply from the belief on the part of followers that the leader has such traits. Although these two types of authority are of historical importance, Weber believed that the trend in the West, and ultimately in the rest of the world, is toward systems of *rational-legal* authority (Bunzel, 2007). In such systems, authority is derived from rules legally and rationally enacted. Thus, the president of the United States derives his authority ultimately from the laws of society. The evolution of rational-legal authority, with its accompanying bureaucracies, is only one part of Weber's general argument on the rationalization of the Western world.

Weber also did detailed and sophisticated analyses of the rationalization of such phenomena as religion, law, the city, and even music. But we can illustrate Weber's mode of thinking with one other example—the rationalization of the economic institution. This discussion is couched in Weber's broader analysis of the relationship between religion and capitalism. In a wide-ranging historical study, Weber sought to understand why a rational economic system (capitalism) had developed in the West and why it had failed to develop in the rest of the world. Weber accorded a central role to religion in this process. At one level, he was engaged in a dialogue with the Marxists in an effort to show that, contrary to what many Marxists of the day believed, religion was not merely an epiphenomenon. Instead, it had played a key role in the rise of capitalism in the West and in its failure to develop elsewhere in the world. Weber argued that it was a distinctively rational religious system (Calvinism) that played the central role in the rise of capitalism in the West. In contrast, in the other parts of the world that he studied, Weber found more irrational religious systems (for example, Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism), which helped inhibit the development of a rational economic system. However, in the end, one gets the feeling that these religions provided only temporary barriers, for the economic systems—indeed, the entire social structure—of these societies ultimately would become rationalized.

Although rationalization lies at the heart of Weberian theory, it is far from all there is to the theory. But this is not the place to go into that rich body of material.

Instead, let us return to the development of sociological theory. A key issue in that development is this: Why did Weber's theory prove more attractive to later sociological theorists than Marxian theory?

The Acceptance of Weber's Theory

One reason is that Weber proved to be more acceptable politically. Instead of espousing Marxian radicalism, Weber was more of a liberal on some issues and a conservative on others (for example, the role of the state). Although he was a severe critic of many aspects of modern capitalist society and came to many of the same critical conclusions as did Marx, he was not one to propose radical solutions to problems (Heins, 1993). In fact, he felt that the radical reforms offered by many Marxists and other socialists would do more harm than good.

Later sociological theorists, especially Americans, saw their society under attack by Marxian theory. Largely conservative in orientation, they cast about for theoretical alternatives to Marxism. One of those who proved attractive was Max Weber. (Durkheim and Vilfredo Pareto were others.) After all, rationalization affected not only capitalist but also socialist societies. Indeed, from Weber's point of view, rationalization constituted an even greater problem in socialist than in capitalist societies.

Also in Weber's favor was the form in which he presented his judgments. He spent most of his life doing detailed historical studies, and his political conclusions were often made within the context of his research. Thus they usually sounded very scientific and academic. Marx, although he did much serious research, also wrote a good deal of explicitly polemical material. Even his more academic work is laced with acid political judgments. For example, in *Capital* (1867/1967), he described capitalists as "vampires" and "werewolves." Weber's more academic style helped make him more acceptable to later sociologists.

Another reason for the greater acceptability of Weber was that he operated in a philosophical tradition that also helped shape the work of later sociologists. That is, Weber operated in the Kantian tradition, which meant, as we have seen, that he tended to think in cause-and-effect terms. This kind of thinking was more acceptable to later sociologists, who were largely unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the dialectical logic that informed Marx's work.

Finally, Weber appeared to offer a much more rounded approach to the social world than did Marx. Whereas Marx appeared to be almost totally preoccupied with the economy, Weber was interested in a wide range of social phenomena. This diversity of focus seemed to give later sociologists more to work with than the apparently more single-minded concerns of Marx.

Weber produced most of his major works in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Early in his career Weber was identified more as a historian who was concerned with sociological issues, but in the early 1900s his focus grew more and more sociological. Indeed, he became the dominant sociologist of his time in Germany. In 1910, he founded (with, among others, Georg Simmel, whom we discuss next) the German Sociological Society (Glatzer, 1998). His home in Heidelberg was an intellectual center not only for sociologists but for scholars from many fields. Although his work was broadly influential in Germany, it was to become even more influential in the

United States, especially after Talcott Parsons introduced Weber's ideas (and those of other European theorists, especially Durkheim) to a large American audience. Although Marx's ideas did not have a significant positive effect on American sociological theorists until the 1960s, Weber was already highly influential by the late 1930s.

Simmel's Theory

Georg Simmel was Weber's contemporary and a cofounder of the German Sociological Society. Simmel was a somewhat atypical sociological theorist (Frisby, 1981; D. Levine, Carter, and Gorman, 1976a, 1976b). For one thing, he had an immediate and profound effect on the development of American sociological theory, whereas Marx and Weber were largely ignored for a number of years. Simmel's work helped shape the development of one of the early centers of American sociology—the University of Chicago—and its major theory, symbolic interactionism (Jaworski, 1995, 1997). The Chicago school and symbolic interactionism came, as we will see, to dominate American sociology in the 1920s and early 1930s (Bulmer, 1984). Simmel's ideas were influential at Chicago mainly because the dominant figures in the early years of Chicago, Albion Small and Robert Park, had been exposed to Simmel's theories in Berlin in the late 1800s. Park attended Simmel's lectures in 1899 and 1900, and Small carried on an extensive correspondence with Simmel during the 1890s. They were instrumental in bringing Simmel's ideas to students and faculty at Chicago, in translating some of his work, and in bringing it to the attention of a large-scale American audience (Frisby, 1984:29).

Another atypical aspect of Simmel's work is his "level" of analysis, or at least that level for which he became best known in America. Whereas Weber and Marx were preoccupied with large-scale issues like the rationalization of society and a capitalist economy, Simmel was best known for his work on smaller-scale issues, especially individual action and interaction. He became famous early for his thinking, derived from Kantian philosophy, on *forms* of interaction (for example, conflict) and *types* of interactants (for example, the stranger). Basically, Simmel saw that understanding interaction among people was one of the major tasks of sociology. However, it was impossible to study the massive number of interactions in social life without some conceptual tools. This is where forms of interaction and types of interactants came in. Simmel felt that he could isolate a limited number of forms of interaction that could be found in a large number of social settings. Thus equipped, one could analyze and understand these different interaction settings. The development of a limited number of types of interactants could be similarly useful in explaining interaction settings. This work had a profound effect on symbolic interactionism, which, as the name suggests, was focally concerned with interaction. One of the ironies, however, is that Simmel also was concerned with large-scale issues similar to those that obsessed Marx and Weber. However, this work was much less influential than his work on interaction, although there are contemporary signs of a growing interest in the large-scale aspects of Simmel's sociology.

It was partly Simmel's style in his work on interaction that made him accessible to early American sociological theorists. Although he wrote heavy tomes like those of Weber and Marx, he also wrote a set of deceptively simple essays on such interesting

topics as poverty, the prostitute, the miser and the spendthrift, and the stranger. The brevity of such essays and the high interest level of the material made the dissemination of Simmel's ideas much easier. Unfortunately, the essays had the negative effect of obscuring Simmel's more massive works (for example, *Philosophy of Money*, translated in 1978; see Poggi, 1993), which were potentially as significant to sociology. Nevertheless, it was partly through the short and clever essays that Simmel had a much more significant effect on early American sociological theory than either Marx or Weber did.

We should not leave Simmel without saying something about *Philosophy of Money* (1907/1978), because its English translation made Simmel's work attractive to a whole new set of theorists interested in culture and society. Although a macro orientation is clearer in *Philosophy of Money*, it always existed in Simmel's work. For example, it is clear in his famous work on the dyad and the triad. Simmel thought that some crucial sociological developments take place when a two-person group (or *dyad*) is transformed into a *triad* by the addition of a third party. Social possibilities emerge that simply could not exist in a dyad. For example, in a triad, one of the members can become an arbitrator or mediator of the differences between the other two. More important, two of the members can band together and dominate the other member. This represents on a small scale what can happen with the emergence of large-scale structures that become separate from individuals and begin to dominate them.

This theme lies at the base of *Philosophy of Money*. Simmel was concerned primarily with the emergence in the modern world of a money economy that becomes separate from the individual and predominant. This theme, in turn, is part of an even broader and more pervasive one in Simmel's work: the domination of the culture as a whole over the individual. As Simmel saw it, in the modern world, the larger culture and all its various components (including the money economy) expand, and as they expand, the importance of the individual decreases. Thus, for example, as the industrial technology associated with a modern economy expands and grows more sophisticated, the skills and abilities of the individual worker grow progressively less important. In the end, the worker is confronted with an industrial machine over which he or she can exert little, if any, control. More generally, Simmel thought that in the modern world, the expansion of the larger culture leads to the growing insignificance of the individual.

Although sociologists have become increasingly attuned to the broader implications of Simmel's work, his early influence was primarily through his studies of small-scale social phenomena, such as the forms of interaction and types of interactants.

The Origins of British Sociology

We have been examining the development of sociology in France (Comte, Durkheim) and Germany (Marx, Weber, and Simmel). We turn now to the parallel development of sociology in England. As we will see, continental European ideas had their impact on early British sociology, but more important were native influences.



SIGMUND FREUD

A Biographical Sketch

Another leading figure in German social science in the late 1800s and early 1900s was Sigmund Freud. Although he was not a sociologist, Freud influenced the work of many sociologists (for example, Talcott Parsons and Norbert Elias) and continues to be of relevance to social

theorists (Chodorow, 1990; A. Elliott, 1992; Kaye, 1991, 2003; Kurzweil, 1995; Movahedi, 2007).

Sigmund Freud was born in the Austro-Hungarian city of Freiberg on May 6, 1856. In 1859, his family moved to Vienna, and in 1873, Freud entered the medical school at the University of Vienna. Freud was more interested in science than in medicine and took a position in a physiology laboratory. He completed his degree in medicine, and after leaving the laboratory in 1882, he worked in a hospital and then set up a private medical practice with a specialty in nervous diseases.

Freud at first used hypnosis in an effort to deal with a type of neurosis known as hysteria. He had learned the technique in Paris from Jean Martin Charcot in 1885. Later he adopted a technique, pioneered by a fellow Viennese physician, Joseph Breuer, in which hysterical symptoms disappeared when the patient talked through the circumstances in which the symptoms first arose. By 1895, Freud had published a book with Breuer with a series of revolutionary implications: that the causes of neuroses like hysteria were psychological (not, as had been believed, physiological) and that the therapy involved talking through the original causes. Thus was born the practical and theoretical field of psychoanalysis. Freud began to part company with Breuer as he came to see sexual factors, or more generally the libido, at the root of neuroses. Over the next several years, Freud refined his therapeutic techniques and wrote a great deal about his new ideas.

By 1902, Freud began to gather a number of disciples around him, and they met weekly at his house. By 1903 or 1904, others (like Carl Jung) began to use Freud's ideas in their psychiatric practices. In 1908, the first Psychoanalytic Congress was held, and the next year a periodical for disseminating psychoanalytic knowledge was formed. As quickly as it had formed, the new field of psychoanalysis became splintered as Freud broke with people like Jung and they went off to develop their own ideas and found their own groups. World War I slowed the development of psychoanalysis, but psychoanalysis expanded and developed greatly in the 1920s. With the rise of Nazism, the center of psychoanalysis shifted to the United States, where it remains to this day. But Freud remained in Vienna until the Nazis took over in 1938, despite the fact that he was Jewish and the Nazis had burned his books as early as 1933. On June 4, 1938, only after a ransom had been paid and President Roosevelt had interceded, Sigmund Freud left Vienna. Freud had suffered from cancer of the jaw since 1923, and he died in London on September 23, 1939.

Political Economy, Ameliorism, and Social Evolution

Philip Abrams (1968) contended that British sociology was shaped in the nineteenth century by three often conflicting sources—political economy, ameliorism, and social evolution.⁷ Thus when the Sociological Society of London was founded in 1903, there were strong differences over the definition of *sociology*. However, there were few who doubted the view that sociology could be a science. It was the differences that gave British sociology its distinctive character, and we will look at each of them briefly.

Political Economy

We have already touched on *political economy*, which was a theory of industrial and capitalist society traceable in part to the work of Adam Smith (1723–1790).⁸ As we saw, political economy had a profound effect on Karl Marx. Marx studied political economy closely, and he was critical of it. But that was not the direction taken by British economists and sociologists. They tended to accept Smith's idea that there was an "invisible hand" that shaped the market for labor and goods. The market was seen as an independent reality that stood above individuals and controlled their behavior. The British sociologists, like the political economists and unlike Marx, saw the market as a positive force, as a source of order, harmony, and integration in society. Because they saw the market, and more generally society, in a positive light, the task of the sociologist was not to criticize society but simply to gather data on the laws by which it operated. The goal was to provide the government with the facts it needed to understand the way the system worked and to direct its workings wisely.

The emphasis was on facts, but which facts? Whereas Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Comte looked to the structures of society for their basic facts, the British thinkers tended to focus on the individuals who made up those structures. In dealing with large-scale structures, they tended to collect individual-level data and then combine them to form a collective portrait. In the mid-1800s it was the statisticians who dominated British social science, and this kind of data collection was deemed to be the major task of sociology. The objective was the accumulation of "pure" facts without theorizing or philosophizing. These empirical sociologists were detached from the concerns of social theorists. Instead of general theorizing, the "emphasis settled on the business of producing more exact indicators, better methods of classification and data collection, improved life tables, higher levels of comparability between discrete bodies of data, and the like" (Abrams, 1968:18).

It was almost in spite of themselves that these statistically oriented sociologists came to see some limitations in their approach. A few began to feel the need for broader theorizing. To them, a problem such as poverty pointed to failings in the market system as well as in the society as a whole. But most, focused as they were on individuals, did not question the larger system; they turned instead to more detailed

⁷ For later developments in British sociology, see Abrams et al. (1981).

⁸ Smith is usually included as a leading member of the Scottish Enlightenment (Chitnis, 1976; Strydom, 2005) and as one of the Scottish Moralists (L. Schneider, 1967:xi), who were establishing a basis for sociology.

field studies and to the development of more complicated and more exact statistical techniques. To them, the source of the problem had to lie in inadequate research methods, not in the system as a whole. As Philip Abrams noted, “Focusing persistently on the distribution of individual circumstances, the statisticians found it hard to break through to a perception of poverty as a product of social structure. . . . They did not and probably could not achieve the concept of structural victimization” (1968:27). In addition to their theoretical and methodological commitments to the study of individuals, the statisticians worked too closely with government policy makers to arrive at the conclusion that the larger political and economic system was the problem.

Ameliorism

Related to, but separable from, political economy was the second defining characteristic of British sociology—*ameliorism*, or a desire to solve social problems by reforming individuals. Although British scholars began to recognize that there were problems in society (for example, poverty), they still believed in that society and wanted to preserve it. They desired to forestall violence and revolution and to reform the system so that it could continue essentially as it was. Above all, they wanted to prevent the coming of a socialist society. Thus, like French sociology and some branches of German sociology, British sociology was conservatively oriented.

Because the British sociologists could not, or would not, trace the source of problems such as poverty to the society as a whole, the source had to lie within the individuals themselves. This was an early form of what William Ryan (1971) later called “blaming the victim.” Much attention was devoted to a long series of individual problems—“ignorance, spiritual destitution, impurity, bad sanitation, pauperism, crime, and intemperance—above all intemperance” (Abrams, 1968:39). Clearly, there was a tendency to look for a simple cause for all social ills, and the one that suggested itself before all others was alcoholism. What made this perfect to the ameliorist was that this was an individual pathology, not a social pathology. The ameliorists lacked a theory of social structure, a theory of the social causes of such individual problems.

Social Evolution

But a stronger sense of social structure was lurking below the surface of British sociology, and it burst through in the latter part of the nineteenth century with the growth of interest in social evolution (Maryanski, 2005; Sanderson, 2001). One important influence was the work of Auguste Comte, part of which had been translated into English in the 1850s by Harriet Martineau (Hoecker-Drysdale, 2000). Although Comte’s work did not inspire immediate interest, by the last quarter of the century, a number of thinkers had been attracted to it and to its concern for the larger structures of society, its scientific (positivistic) orientation, its comparative orientation, and its evolutionary theory. However, a number of British thinkers sharpened their own conception of the world in opposition to some of the excesses of Comtian theory (for example, the tendency to elevate sociology to the status of a religion).

In Abrams’s view, the real importance of Comte lay in his providing one of the bases on which opposition could be mounted against the “oppressive genius of Herbert

Spencer” (Abrams, 1968:58). In both a positive and a negative sense, Spencer was a dominant figure in British sociological theory, especially evolutionary theory (J. Turner, 2000, 2007a).

Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)

In attempting to understand Spencer’s ideas (Haines, 2005; J. Turner, 2005), it is useful to compare and contrast them with Comtian theory.

Spencer and Comte

Spencer is often categorized with Comte in terms of their influence on the development of sociological theory (J. Turner, 2001a), but there are some important differences between them. For example, it is less easy to categorize Spencer as a conservative. In fact, in his early years, Spencer is better seen as a political liberal, and he retained elements of liberalism throughout his life. However, it is also true that Spencer grew more conservative during the course of his life and that his basic influence, as was true of Comte, was conservative.

One of his liberal views, which coexisted rather uncomfortably with his conservatism, was his acceptance of a *laissez-faire* doctrine: he felt that the state should not intervene in individual affairs except in the rather passive function of protecting people. This meant that Spencer, unlike Comte, was not interested in social reforms; he wanted social life to evolve free of external control.

This difference points to Spencer as a *Social Darwinist* (G. Jones, 1980; Weiler, 2007a). As such, he held the evolutionary view that the world was growing progressively better. Therefore, it should be left alone; outside interference could only worsen the situation. He adopted the view that social institutions, like plants and animals, adapted progressively and positively to their social environment. He also accepted the Darwinian view that a process of natural selection, “survival of the fittest,” occurred in the social world. That is, if unimpeded by external intervention, people who were “fit” would survive and proliferate whereas the “unfit” eventually would die out. (Interestingly, it was Spencer who coined the phrase “survival of the fittest” several years before Charles Darwin’s work on natural selection.) Another difference with Comte was that Spencer emphasized the individual, whereas Comte focused on larger units such as the family.

Comte and Spencer shared with Durkheim and others a commitment to a science of sociology (Haines, 1992), which was a very attractive perspective to early theorists. Another influence of Spencer’s work, shared with both Comte and Durkheim, was his tendency to see society as an *organism*. In this, Spencer borrowed his perspective and concepts from biology. He was concerned with the overall structure of society, the interrelationship of the *parts* of society, and the *functions* of the parts for each other as well as for the system as a whole.

Most important, Spencer, like Comte, had an evolutionary conception of historical development (Maryanski, 2005). However, Spencer was critical of Comte’s evolutionary theory on several grounds. Specifically, he rejected Comte’s law of the three stages. He argued that Comte was content to deal with evolution in the realm

of ideas, in terms of intellectual development. Spencer, however, sought to develop an evolutionary theory in the real, material world.

Evolutionary Theory

It is possible to identify at least two major evolutionary perspectives in Spencer's work (Haines, 1988; Perrin, 1976).

The first of these theories relates primarily to the increasing size of society. Society grows through both the multiplication of individuals and the union of groups (compounding). The increasing size of society brings with it larger and more differentiated social structures, as well as the increasing differentiation of the functions they perform. In addition to their growth in size, societies evolve through compounding, that is, by unifying more and more adjoining groups. Thus, Spencer talks of the evolutionary movement from simple to compound, doubly-compound, and trebly-compound societies.

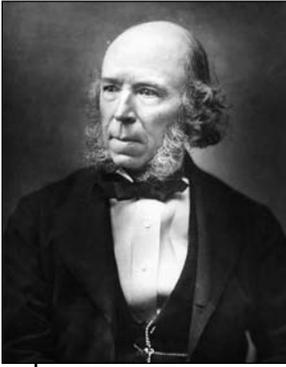
Spencer also offers a theory of evolution from *militant* to *industrial* societies. Earlier, militant societies are defined by being structured for offensive and defensive warfare. While Spencer was critical of warfare, he felt that in an earlier stage it was functional in bringing societies together (for example, through military conquest) and in creating the larger aggregates of people necessary for the development of industrial society. However, with the emergence of industrial society, warfare ceases to be functional and serves to impede further evolution. Industrial society is based on friendship, altruism, elaborate specialization, recognition for achievements rather than the characteristics one is born with, and voluntary cooperation among highly disciplined individuals. Such a society is held together by voluntary contractual relations and, more important, by a strong common morality. The government's role is restricted and focuses only on what people ought not to do. Obviously, modern industrial societies are less warlike than their militant predecessors. Although Spencer sees a general evolution in the direction of industrial societies, he also recognizes that it is possible that there will be periodic regressions to warfare and more militant societies.

In his ethical and political writings, Spencer offered other ideas on the evolution of society. For one thing, he saw society as progressing toward an ideal, or perfect, moral state. For another, he argued that the fittest societies survive and that unfit societies should be permitted to die off. The result of this process is adaptive upgrading for the world as a whole.

Thus Spencer offered a rich and complicated set of ideas on social evolution. His ideas first enjoyed great success, then were rejected for many years, and more recently have been revived with the rise of neoevolutionary sociological theories (Buttel, 1990).

The Reaction against Spencer in Britain

Despite his emphasis on the individual, Spencer was best known for his large-scale theory of social evolution. In this, he stood in stark contrast to the sociology that preceded him in Britain. However, the reaction against Spencer was based more on the threat that his idea of survival of the fittest posed to the ameliorism so dear to most early British sociologists. Although Spencer later repudiated some of his more



HERBERT SPENCER

A Biographical Sketch

Herbert Spencer was born in Derby, England, on April 27, 1820. He was not schooled in the arts and humanities, but rather in technical and utilitarian matters. In 1837 he began work as a civil engineer for a railway, an occupation he held until 1846. During this period, Spencer continued

to study on his own and began to publish scientific and political works.

In 1848 Spencer was appointed an editor of *The Economist*, and his intellectual ideas began to solidify. By 1850, he had completed his first major work, *Social Statics*. During the writing of this work, Spencer first began to experience insomnia, and over the years his mental and physical problems mounted. He was to suffer a series of nervous breakdowns throughout the rest of his life.

In 1853 Spencer received an inheritance that allowed him to quit his job and live for the rest of his life as a gentleman scholar. He never earned a university degree or held an academic position. As he grew more isolated, and physical and mental illness mounted, Spencer's productivity as a scholar increased. Eventually, Spencer began to achieve not only fame within England but also an international reputation. As Richard Hofstadter put it: "In the three decades after the Civil War it was impossible to be active in any field of intellectual work without mastering Spencer" (1959:33). Among his supporters was the important industrialist Andrew Carnegie, who wrote the following to Spencer during the latter's fatal illness of 1903:

Dear Master Teacher . . . you come to me every day in thought, and the everlasting "why" intrudes—Why lies he? Why must he go? . . . The world jogs on unconscious of its greatest mind. . . . But it will wake some day to its teachings and decree Spencer's place is with the greatest.

(Carnegie, cited in Peel, 1971:2)

outrageous ideas, he did argue for a survival-of-the-fittest philosophy and against government intervention and social reform:

Fostering the good-for-nothing at the expense of the good, is an extreme cruelty. It is a deliberate stirring-up of miseries for future generations. There is no greater curse to posterity than that of bequeathing to them an increasing population of imbeciles and idlers and criminals. . . . The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, to clear the world of them, and make room for better. . . . If they are not sufficiently complete to live, they die, and it is best they should die.

(Spencer, cited in Abrams, 1968:74)

Such sentiments were clearly at odds with the ameliorative orientation of the British reformer-sociologists.

But that was not to be Spencer's fate.

One of Spencer's most interesting characteristics, one that was ultimately to be the cause of his intellectual undoing, was his unwillingness to read the work of other people. In this, he resembled another early giant of sociology, Auguste Comte, who practiced "cerebral hygiene." Of the need to read the works of others, Spencer said: "All my life I have been a thinker and not a reader, being able to say with Hobbes that 'if I had read as much as other men I would have known as little' " (Wiltshire, 1978:67). A friend asked Spencer's opinion of a book, and "his reply was that on looking into the book he saw that its fundamental assumption was erroneous, and therefore did not care to read it" (Wiltshire, 1978:67). One author wrote of Spencer's "incomprehensible way of absorbing knowledge through the powers of his skin . . . he never seemed to read books" (Wiltshire, 1978:67).

If he didn't read the work of other scholars, where, then, did Spencer's ideas and insights come from? According to Spencer, they emerged involuntarily and intuitively from his mind. He said that his ideas emerged "little by little, in unobtrusive ways, without conscious intention or appreciable effort" (Wiltshire, 1978:66). Such intuition was deemed by Spencer to be far more effective than careful study and thought: "A solution reached in the way described is more likely to be true than one reached in the pursuance of a determined effort [which] causes perversion of thought" (Wiltshire, 1978:66).

Spencer suffered because of his unwillingness to read seriously the works of other people. In fact, if he read other work, it was often only to find confirmation for his own, independently created ideas. He ignored those ideas that did not agree with his. Thus, his contemporary, Charles Darwin, said of Spencer: "If he had trained himself to observe more, even at the expense of . . . some loss of thinking power, he would have been a wonderful man" (Wiltshire, 1978:70). Spencer's disregard for the rules of scholarship led him to a series of outrageous ideas and unsubstantiated assertions about the evolution of the world. For these reasons, sociologists in the twentieth century came to reject Spencer's work and to substitute for it careful scholarship and empirical research.

Spencer died on December 8, 1903.

The Key Figure in Early Italian Sociology

We close this sketch of early, primarily conservative, European sociological theory with a brief mention of one Italian sociologist, Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923). Pareto was influential in his time, but his contemporary relevance is minimal (for one exception, see Powers, 1986). There was a brief outburst of interest in Pareto's (1935) work in the 1930s, when the major American theorist, Talcott Parsons, devoted as much attention to him as he gave to Weber and Durkheim. However, in recent years, except for a few of his major concepts, Pareto also has receded in importance and contemporary relevance (Femia, 1995).

Zeitlin argued that Pareto developed his "major ideas as a refutation of Marx" (1996:171). In fact, Pareto was rejecting not only Marx but also a good portion of

Enlightenment philosophy. For example, whereas the Enlightenment philosophers emphasized rationality, Pareto emphasized the role of nonrational factors such as human instincts (Mozetič and Weiler, 2007). This emphasis also was tied to his rejection of Marxian theory. That is, because nonrational, instinctual factors were so important and so unchanging, it was unrealistic to hope to achieve dramatic social changes with an economic revolution.

Pareto also developed a theory of social change that stood in stark contrast to Marxian theory. Whereas Marx's theory focused on the role of the masses, Pareto offered an elite theory of social change, which held that society inevitably is dominated by a small elite that operates on the basis of enlightened self-interest (Adams, 2005). It rules over the masses of people, who are dominated by nonrational forces. Because they lack rational capacities, the masses, in Pareto's system, are unlikely to be a revolutionary force. Social change occurs when the elite begins to degenerate and is replaced by a new elite derived from the nongoverning elite or higher elements of the masses. Once the new elite is in power, the process begins anew. Thus, we have a cyclical theory of social change instead of the directional theories offered by Marx, Comte, Spencer, and others. In addition, Pareto's theory of change largely ignores the plight of the masses. Elites come and go, but the lot of the masses remains the same.

This theory, however, was not Pareto's lasting contribution to sociology. That lay in his scientific conception of sociology and the social world: "My wish is to construct a system of sociology on the model of celestial mechanics [astronomy], physics, chemistry" (cited in Hook, 1965:57). Briefly, Pareto conceived of society as a system in equilibrium, a whole consisting of interdependent parts. A change in one part was seen as leading to changes in other parts of the system. Pareto's systemic conception of society was the most important reason Parsons devoted so much attention to Pareto's work in his 1937 book, *The Structure of Social Action*, and it was Pareto's most important influence on Parsons's thinking. Fused with similar views held by those who had an organic image of society (Comte, Durkheim, and Spencer, for example), Pareto's theory played a central role in the development of Parsons's theory and, more generally, in structural functionalism.

Although few modern sociologists now read Pareto's work, it can be seen as a rejection of the Enlightenment and of Marxism and as offering an elite theory of social change that stands in opposition to the Marxian perspective.

Turn-of-the-Century Developments in European Marxism

While many nineteenth-century sociologists were developing their theories in opposition to Marx, there was a simultaneous effort by a number of Marxists to clarify and extend Marxian theory (Beilharz, 2005f; Steinmetz, 2007). Between roughly 1875 and 1925, there was little overlap between Marxism and sociology. (Weber is an exception to this.) The two schools of thought were developing in parallel fashion with little or no interchange between them.

After the death of Marx, Marxian theory was first dominated by those who saw in his theory scientific and economic determinism (Bakker, 2007a). Wallerstein calls this the era of “orthodox Marxism” (1986:1301). Friedrich Engels, Marx’s benefactor and collaborator, lived on after Marx’s death and can be seen as the first exponent of such a perspective. Basically, this view was that Marx’s scientific theory had uncovered the economic laws that ruled the capitalist world. Such laws pointed to the inevitable collapse of the capitalist system. Early Marxian thinkers, like Karl Kautsky, sought to gain a better understanding of the operation of these laws. There were several problems with this perspective. For one thing, it seemed to rule out political action, a cornerstone of Marx’s position. That is, there seemed no need for individuals, especially workers, to do anything. In that the system was inevitably crumbling, all they had to do was sit back and wait for its demise. On a theoretical level, deterministic Marxism seemed to rule out the dialectical relationship between individuals and larger social structures.

These problems led to a reaction among Marxian theorists and to the development of “*Hegelian Marxism*” in the early 1900s. The Hegelian Marxists refused to reduce Marxism to a scientific theory that ignored individual thought and action. They are labeled Hegelian Marxists because they sought to combine Hegel’s interest in consciousness (which some, including the author of this text, view Marx as sharing) with the determinists’ interest in the economic structures of society. The Hegelian theorists were significant for both theoretical and practical reasons. Theoretically, they reinstated the importance of the individual, consciousness, and the relationship between thought and action. Practically, they emphasized the importance of individual action in bringing about a social revolution.

The major exponent of this point of view was Georg Lukács (Fischer, 1984; Markus, 2005). According to Martin Jay, Lukács was “the founding father of Western Marxism” and his work *History and Class Consciousness* (1922/1968) is “generally acknowledged as the charter document of Hegelian Marxism” (1984:84). Lukács had begun in the early 1900s to integrate Marxism with sociology (in particular, Weberian and Simmelian theory). This integration was soon to accelerate with the development of critical theory in the 1920s and 1930s.

Summary

This chapter sketches the early history of sociological theory. The first section deals with the various social forces involved in the development of sociological theory. Although there were many such influences, we focus on how political revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the rise of capitalism, socialism, feminism, urbanization, religious change, and the growth of science affected sociological theory. The second part of the chapter examines the influence of intellectual forces on the rise of sociological theory in various countries. We begin with France and the role played by the Enlightenment, stressing the conservative and romantic reaction to it. It is out of this interplay that French sociological theory developed. In this context, we examine the major figures in the early years of French sociology—Alexis de Tocqueville, Claude Henri Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte, and Emile Durkheim.

Next we turn to Germany and the role played by Karl Marx in the development of sociology in that country. We discuss the parallel development of Marxian theory and sociological theory and the ways in which Marxian theory influenced sociology, both positively and negatively. We begin with the roots of Marxian theory in Hegelianism, materialism, and political economy. Marx's theory itself is touched upon briefly. The discussion then shifts to the roots of German sociology. Max Weber's work is examined in order to show the diverse sources of German sociology. Also discussed are some of the reasons why Weber's theory proved more acceptable to later sociologists than did Marx's ideas. This section closes with a brief discussion of Georg Simmel's work.

The rise of sociological theory in Britain is considered next. The major sources of British sociology were political economy, ameliorism, and social evolution. In this context, we touch on the work of Herbert Spencer as well as on some of the controversy that surrounded it.

This chapter closes with a brief discussion of Italian sociological theory, in particular the work of Vilfredo Pareto, and the turn-of-the-century developments in European Marxian theory, primarily economic determinism and Hegelian Marxism.

Karl Marx

Chapter Outline

Introduction

The Dialectic

Dialectical Method

Human Potential

Alienation

The Structures of Capitalist Society

Materialist Conception of History

Cultural Aspects of Capitalist Society

Marx's Economics: A Case Study

Communism

Criticisms

Introduction

Marx began his most famous work, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx and Engels 1848/1948), with the following line: “There is a spectre haunting Europe, the spectre of communism.” It might be said that the same ghost is haunting our understanding of Marx. It is difficult to separate the ideas of Marx from the political movements that they inspired. Nevertheless, as Tom Rockmore (2002:96) tells us, we must try “to free Marx from Marxism.”

For many, Marx has become more of an icon than a thinker deserving of serious study. The symbolism of his name tends to muddle understanding of his ideas. Marx is the only theorist we will study who has had political movements and social systems named after him. He is probably the only theorist your friends and family have strong opinions about. He is often criticized, as well as praised, by people who have never actually read his work. Even among his followers, Marx's ideas frequently are reduced to slogans such as “the opium of the people” and “the dictatorship of proletariat,” but the role of these slogans in Marx's encompassing theory often is ignored.

There are many reasons for this lack of understanding of Marx's social theory, the main one being that Marx never really completed his social theory. He planned, early in his career, to publish separate works on economics, law, morals, politics, and

so forth, and then “in a special work, to present them once again as a connected whole, to show the relationship between the parts” (Marx, 1932/1964:280). He never did this final work and never even completed his separate work on economics. Instead, much of his time was taken up by study, journalism, political activity, and a series of minor intellectual and political arguments with friends and adversaries.

In addition, although Marx could write clear and inspiring prose, especially in his political tracts, he often preferred a vocabulary that relied on complex philosophical traditions, and he made these terms even more difficult to understand by implicitly redefining them for his own use. Vilfredo Pareto made the classic critique of Marx by comparing his words to a fable about bats. When someone said they were birds, the bats would cry, “No, we are mice.” When someone said they were mice, they protested that they were birds. Whatever interpretation one makes of Marx, others can offer alternative interpretations. For example, some stress Marx’s early work on human potential and tend to discount his political economy (see, for example, Ollman, 1976; Wallimann, 1981; Wartenberg, 1982). Others stress Marx’s later work on the economic structures of society and see that work as distinct from his early, largely philosophical work on human nature (see Althusser, 1969; Gandy, 1979; McMurty, 1978).¹ A recent interpreter of Marx made the following comment, which applies equally to this chapter: “Virtually every paragraph in this chapter could be accompanied by three concise paragraphs describing why other readers of Marx, erudite and influential, think that this paragraph is wrong, in emphasis or substance” (R. Miller, 1991:105). And, of course, the differing interpretations have political consequences, making any disagreement extremely contentious.²

Despite these problems, Marx’s theories have produced one of sociology’s most productive and significant research programs. When Marx died in 1883, the eleven mourners at his funeral seemed to belie what Engels said in his eulogy: “His name and work will endure through the ages.” Nevertheless, Engels seems to have been right. His ideas have been so influential that even one of his critics admitted that, in a sense, “we are all Marxists now” (P. Singer, 1980:1). As Hannah Arendt (2002:274) wrote, if Marx seems to be forgotten, it is not “because Marx’s thought and the methods he introduced have been abandoned, but rather because they have become so axiomatic that their origin is no longer remembered.”

It is for these reasons that a return to Marx has proven so productive to those working in sociology. Thinking about Marx helps to clarify what sociology and, indeed, our society have taken for granted. Rediscoveries and reinterpretation of Marx have often renewed sociology and opened up a fresh perspective on such issues as alienation, globalization, and the environment (Foster, 2000).

Despite differing interpretations, there is general agreement that Marx’s main interest was in the historical basis of inequality, especially the unique form that it takes under capitalism. However, Marx’s approach is different from many of the theories that we will examine. For Marx, a theory about how society works would be partial, because

¹ The approach here is based on the premise that there is no discontinuity or contradiction between Marx’s early work on human potential and his later work on the structures of capitalist society—that his early ideas continue, at least implicitly, in his later work even though these ideas were certainly modified by his study of the economic structures of capitalism.

² In Joseph Stalin’s Soviet Union, there was no problem about the “correct” interpretation of Marx. Stalin himself provided the interpretation and brutally eliminated all those, such as Leon Trotsky, who disagreed.

what he mainly sought was a theory about how to change society. Marx's theory, then, is an analysis of inequality under capitalism and how to change it.

As capitalism has come to dominate the globe and the most significant communist alternatives have disappeared, some might argue that Marx's theories have lost their relevance. However, once we realize that Marx provides an analysis of capitalism, we can see that his theories are more relevant now than ever (McLennan, 2001:43). Marx provides a diagnosis of capitalism that is able to reveal its tendencies to crises, point out its perennial inequalities, and, if nothing else, demand that capitalism live up to its own promises. The example of Marx makes an important point about theory. Even when their particular predictions are disproved—even though the proletariat revolution that Marx believed to be imminent did not come about—theories still hold a value as an alternative to our current society. Theories may not tell us what will happen, but they can argue for what should happen and help us develop a plan for carrying out the change that the theory envisions or for resisting the change that the theory predicts.

The Dialectic

Vladimir Lenin (1972:180) said that no one can fully understand Marx's work without a prior understanding of the German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. We can only hope that this is not true, because Hegel was one of the most purposefully difficult philosophers ever to have written. Nevertheless, we must understand some of Hegel in order to appreciate the central Marxian conception of the dialectic.

The idea of a dialectical philosophy had been around for centuries (Gadamer, 1989). Its basic idea is the centrality of contradiction. While most philosophies, and indeed common sense, treat contradictions as mistakes, a dialectical philosophy believes that contradictions exist in reality and that the most appropriate way to understand reality is to study the development of those contradictions. Hegel used the idea of contradiction to understand historical change. According to Hegel, historical change has been driven by the contradictory understandings that are the essence of reality, by our attempts to resolve the contradictions, and by the new contradictions that develop.

Marx also accepted the centrality of contradictions to historical change. We see this in such well-known formulations as the "contradictions of capitalism" and "class contradictions." However, unlike Hegel, Marx did not believe that these contradictions could be worked out in our understanding, that is, in our minds. Instead, for Marx these are real, existing contradictions (Wilde, 1991:277). For Marx, such contradictions are resolved not by the philosopher sitting in an armchair but by a life-and-death struggle that changes the social world. This was a crucial transformation because it allowed Marx to move the dialectic out of the realm of philosophy and into the realm of a study of social relations grounded in the material world. It is this focus that makes Marx's work so relevant to sociology, even though the dialectical approach is very different from the mode of thinking used by most sociologists. The dialectic leads to an interest in the conflicts and contradictions among various levels of social reality, rather than to the more traditional sociological interest in the ways these various levels mesh neatly into a cohesive whole.

For example, one of the contradictions within capitalism is the relationship between the workers and the capitalists who own the factories and other means of production with which the work is done. The capitalist must exploit the workers in order to make a profit from the workers' labor. The workers, in contradiction to the capitalists, want to keep at least some of the profit for themselves. Marx believed that this contradiction was at the heart of capitalism, and that it would grow worse as capitalists drove more and more people to become workers by forcing small firms out of business and as competition between the capitalists forced them to further exploit the workers to make a profit. As capitalism expands, the number of workers exploited, as well as the degree of exploitation, increases. This contradiction can be resolved not through philosophy but only through social change. The tendency for the level of exploitation to escalate leads to more and more resistance by the workers. Resistance begets more exploitation and oppression, and the likely result is a confrontation between the two classes (Boswell and Dixon, 1993).

Dialectical Method

Marx's focus on real, existing contradictions led to a particular method for studying social phenomena that has also come to be called "dialectical" (T. Ball, 1991; Friedrichs, 1972; Ollman, 1976; L. Schneider, 1971; Starosta, 2008).

Fact and Value

In dialectical analysis, social values are not separable from social facts. Many sociologists believe that their values can and must be separated from their study of facts about the social world. The dialectical thinker believes that it is not only impossible to keep values out of the study of the social world but also undesirable, because to do so would produce a dispassionate, inhuman sociology that has little to offer to people in search of answers to the problems they confront. Facts and values are inevitably intertwined, with the result that the study of social phenomena is value-laden. Thus to Marx it was impossible and, even if possible, undesirable to be dispassionate in his analysis of capitalist society. But Marx's emotional involvement in what he was studying did not mean that his observations were inaccurate. It could even be argued that Marx's passionate views on these issues gave him unparalleled insight into the nature of capitalist society. A less passionate student might have delved less deeply into the dynamics of the system. In fact, research into the work of scientists indicates that the idea of a dispassionate scientist is largely a myth and that the very best scientists are the ones who are most passionate about, and committed to, their ideas (Mitroff, 1974).

Reciprocal Relations

The dialectical method of analysis does not see a simple, one-way, cause-and-effect relationship among the various parts of the social world. For the dialectical thinker, social influences never simply flow in one direction as they often do for cause-and-effect thinkers. To the dialectician, one factor may have an effect on another, but it is just as likely

that the latter will have a simultaneous effect on the former. For example, the increasing exploitation of the workers by the capitalist may cause the workers to become increasingly dissatisfied and more militant, but the increasing militancy of the proletariat may well cause the capitalists to react by becoming even more exploitative in order to crush the resistance of the workers. This kind of thinking does not mean that the dialectician never considers causal relationships in the social world. It does mean that when dialectical thinkers talk about causality, they are always attuned to reciprocal relationships among social factors as well as to the dialectical totality of social life in which they are embedded.

Past, Present, Future

Dialecticians are interested not only in the relationships of social phenomena in the contemporary world but also in the relationship of those contemporary realities to both past (Bauman, 1976:81) and future social phenomena. This has two distinct implications for a dialectical sociology. First, it means that dialectical sociologists are concerned with studying the historical roots of the contemporary world as Marx (1857–1858/1964) did in his study of the sources of modern capitalism. In fact, dialectical thinkers are very critical of modern sociology for its failure to do much historical research. A good example of Marx's thinking in this regard is found in the following famous quotation from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

(Marx, 1852/1970:15)

Second, many dialectical thinkers are attuned to current social trends in order to understand the possible future directions of society. This interest in future possibilities is one of the main reasons dialectical sociology is inherently political. It is interested in encouraging practical activities that would bring new possibilities into existence. However, dialecticians believe that the nature of this future world can be discerned only through a careful study of the contemporary world. It is their view that the sources of the future exist in the present.

No Inevitabilities

The dialectical view of the relationship between the present and the future need not imply that the future is determined by the present. Terence Ball (1991) describes Marx as a “political possibilist” rather than a “historical inevitabilist.” Because social phenomena are constantly acting and reacting, the social world defies a simple, deterministic model. The future may be based on some contemporary model, but not inevitably.³ Marx's historical studies showed him that people make choices but that these choices are limited. For instance, Marx believed that society was engaged in a class struggle and that people could choose to participate either in “the revolutionary reconstitution

³ Marx did, however, occasionally discuss the inevitability of socialism.

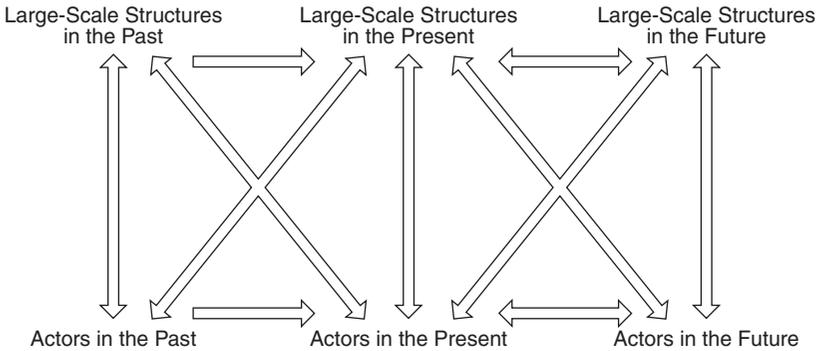


FIGURE 2.1 *Schematic Representation of a Sociologically Relevant Dialectic*

of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes” (Marx and Engels 1848/1948). Marx hoped and believed that the future was to be found in communism, but he did not believe that the workers could simply wait passively for it to arrive. Communism would come only through their choices and struggles.

This disinclination to think deterministically is what makes the best-known model of the dialectic—thesis, antithesis, synthesis—inadequate for sociological use. This simple model implies that a social phenomenon will inevitably spawn an opposing form and that the clash between the two will inevitably lead to a new, synthetic social form. But in the real world, there are no inevitabilities. Furthermore, social phenomena are not easily divided into the simple thesis, antithesis, and synthesis categories adopted by some Marxists. The dialectician is interested in the study of real relationships rather than grand abstractions. It is this disinclination to deal in grand abstractions that led Marx away from Hegel and would lead him today to reject such a great oversimplification of the dialectic as thesis, antithesis, synthesis.

Actors and Structures

Dialectical thinkers are also interested in the dynamic relationship between actors and social structures. Marx was certainly attuned to the ongoing interplay among the major levels of social analysis. The heart of Marx’s thought lies in the relationship between people and the large-scale structures they create (Lefebvre, 1968:8). On the one hand, these large-scale structures help people fulfill themselves; on the other, they represent a grave threat to humanity. But the dialectical method is even more complex than this, because, as we have already seen, the dialectician considers past, present, and future circumstances—both actors and structures. Figure 2.1 is a simplified schematic representation of this enormously complex and sophisticated perspective.

Human Potential

A good portion of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion of Marx’s macro-sociology, in particular his analysis of the macrostructures of capitalism. But before

we can analyze these topics, we need to begin with Marx's thoughts on the more microsociological aspects of social reality. Marx built his critical analysis of the contradictions of capitalist society on his premises about human potential, its relation to labor, and its potential for alienation under capitalism. He believed that there was a real contradiction between our human potential and the way that we must work in capitalist society.

Marx (1850/1964:64) wrote in an early work that human beings are an "ensemble of social relations." He indicates by this that our human potential is intertwined with our specific social relations and our institutional context. Therefore, human nature is not a static thing but varies historically and socially. To understand human potential, we need to understand social history, because human nature is shaped by the same dialectical contradictions that Marx believed shapes the history of society.

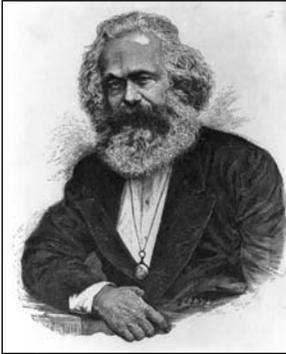
For Marx, a conception of human potential that does not take social and historical factors into account is wrong, but to take them into account is not the same as being without a conception of human nature. It simply complicates this conception. For Marx, there is a human potential in general, but what is more important is the way it is "modified in each historical epoch" (Marx, 1842/1977:609). When speaking of our general human potential, Marx often used the term *species being*. By this he meant the potentials and powers that are uniquely human and that distinguish humans from other species.

Some Marxists, such as Louis Althusser (1969:229), have contended that the mature Marx did not believe in human nature. There are certainly reasons to downplay human nature for someone interested in changing society. Ideas about human nature—such as our "natural" greed, our "natural" tendency to violence, our "natural" gender differences—have often been used to argue against any social change. Such conceptions of human nature are innately conservative. If our problems are due to human nature, we had better learn to just adapt instead of trying to change things.

Nevertheless, there is much evidence that Marx did have a notion of human nature (Geras, 1983). Indeed, it makes little sense to say there is no human nature. Even if we are like a blank chalkboard, the chalkboard must be made out of something and must have a nature such that chalk marks can show up on it. Some conception of human nature is part of any sociological theory. Our concept of human nature dictates how society can be sustained and how it can be changed, but most important for Marx's theory, it suggests how society *should* be changed. The real question is not whether we have a human nature, but what kind of nature it is—unchanging or open to historical processes (the use of the idea human potential here indicates that we think it is open):

Unless we confront the idea, however dangerous, of our human nature and species being and get some understanding of them, we cannot know what it is we might be alienated from or what emancipation might mean. Nor can we determine which of our "slumbering powers" must be awakened to achieve emancipatory goals. A working definition of human nature, however tentative and insecure, is a necessary step in the search for real as opposed to fantastic alternatives. A conversation about our "species being" is desperately called for.

(D. Harvey, 2000:207)



KARL MARX

A Biographical Sketch

Karl Marx was born in Trier, Prussia, on May 5, 1818 (Beilharz, 2005e). His father, a lawyer, provided the family with a fairly typical middle-class existence. Both parents were from rabbinical families, but for business reasons the father had converted to Lutheranism when

Karl was very young. In 1841 Marx received his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin, a school heavily influenced by Hegel and the Young Hegelians, supportive, yet critical, of their master. Marx's doctorate was a dry philosophical treatise, but it did anticipate many of his later ideas. After graduation he became a writer for a liberal-radical newspaper and within ten months had become its editor in chief. However, because of its political positions, the paper was closed shortly thereafter by the government. The early essays published in this period began to reflect a number of the positions that would guide Marx throughout his life. They were liberally sprinkled with democratic principles, humanism, and youthful idealism. He rejected the abstractness of Hegelian philosophy, the naive dreaming of utopian communists, and those activists who were urging what he considered to be premature political action. In rejecting these activists, Marx laid the groundwork for his own life's work:

Practical attempts, even by the masses, can be answered with a cannon as soon as they become dangerous, but ideas that have overcome our intellect and conquered our conviction, ideas to which reason has riveted our conscience, are chains from which one cannot break loose without breaking one's heart; they are demons that one can only overcome by submitting to them.

(Marx, 1842/1977:20)

Marx married in 1843 and soon thereafter was forced to leave Germany for the more liberal atmosphere of Paris. There he continued to grapple with the ideas of Hegel and his supporters, but he also encountered two new sets of ideas—French socialism and English political economy. It was the unique way in which he combined Hegelianism, socialism, and political economy that shaped his intellectual orientation. Also of great importance at this point was his meeting the man who was to become his lifelong friend, benefactor, and collaborator—Friedrich Engels (Carver, 1983). The son of a textile manufacturer, Engels had become a socialist critical of the conditions facing the working class. Much of Marx's compassion for the misery of the working class came from his exposure to Engels and his ideas. In 1844 Engels and Marx had a lengthy conversation in a famous café in Paris and laid the groundwork for a lifelong association. Of that conversation Engels said, "Our complete agreement in all theoretical fields became obvious . . . and our joint work dates from that time" (McLellan, 1973:131). In the following year, Engels published a notable work, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*. During this period Marx wrote a number of abstruse works (many unpublished in his lifetime), including *The Holy Family* (1845/1956) and

The German Ideology (1845–1846/1970) (both coauthored with Engels), but he also produced *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (1932/1964), which better foreshadowed his increasing preoccupation with the economic domain.

While Marx and Engels shared a theoretical orientation, there were many differences between the two men. Marx tended to be theoretical, a disorderly intellectual, and very oriented to his family. Engels was a practical thinker, a neat and tidy businessman, and a person who did not believe in the institution of the family. In spite of their differences, Marx and Engels forged a close union in which they collaborated on books and articles and worked together in radical organizations, and Engels even helped support Marx throughout the rest of his life so that Marx could devote himself to his intellectual and political endeavors.

In spite of the close association of the names of Marx and Engels, Engels made it clear that he was the junior partner:

Marx could very well have done without me. What Marx accomplished I would not have achieved. Marx stood higher, saw farther, and took a wider and quicker view than the rest of us. Marx was a genius.

(Engels, cited in McLellan, 1973:131–132)

In fact, many believe that Engels failed to understand many of the subtleties of Marx's work (C. Smith, 1997). After Marx's death, Engels became the leading spokesperson for Marxian theory and in various ways distorted and oversimplified it, although he remained faithful to the political perspective he had forged with Marx.

Because some of his writings had upset the Prussian government, the French government (at the request of the Prussians) expelled Marx in 1845, and he moved to Brussels. His radicalism was growing, and he had become an active member of the international revolutionary movement. He also associated with the Communist League and was asked to write a document (with Engels) expounding its aims and beliefs. The result was the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 (1848/1948), a work that was characterized by ringing political slogans (for example, "Working men of all countries, unite!").

In 1849 Marx moved to London, and, in light of the failure of the political revolutions of 1848, he began to withdraw from active revolutionary activity and to move into more serious and detailed research on the workings of the capitalist system. In 1852, he began his famous studies in the British Museum of the working conditions in capitalism. These studies ultimately resulted in the three volumes of *Capital*, the first of which was published in 1867; the other two were published posthumously. He lived in poverty during these years, barely managing to survive on a small income from his writings and the support of Engels. In 1864 Marx became reinvolvement in political activity by joining the International, an international movement of workers. He soon gained preeminence within the movement and devoted a number of years to it. He began to gain fame both as a leader of the International and as the author of *Capital*. But the disintegration of the International by 1876, the failure of various revolutionary movements, and personal illness took their toll on Marx. His wife died in 1881, a daughter in 1882, and Marx himself on March 14, 1883.

Labor

For Marx, species being and human potential are intimately related to labor:

Labour is, in the first place, a process in which both man and Nature participate, and in which man of his own accord starts, regulates, and controls the material reactions between himself and NatureBy thus acting on the external world and changing it, he at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers and compels them to act in obedience to his swayWe presuppose labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human. A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process we get a result that existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose. (Marx, 1867/1967:177–178)

We see in that quotation many important parts of Marx's view of the relation between labor and human nature. First, what distinguishes us from other animals—our species being—is that our labor creates something in reality that previously existed only in our imagination. Our production reflects our purpose. Marx calls this process in which we create external objects out of our internal thoughts *objectification*. Second, this labor is material (Sayers, 2007). It works with the more material aspects of nature (e.g., raising fruits and vegetables, cutting down trees for wood) in order to satisfy our material needs. Finally, Marx believed that this labor does not just transform the material aspects of nature but also transforms us, including our needs, our consciousness, and our human nature. Labor is thus at the same time (1) the objectification of our purpose, (2) the establishment of an essential relation between human need and the material objects of our need, and (3) the transformation of our human nature.

Marx's use of the term *labor* is not restricted to economic activities; it encompasses all productive actions that transform the material aspects of nature in accordance with our purpose. Whatever is created through this free purposive activity is both an expression of our human nature and a transformation of it.

As we will see below, the process of labor has been changed under capitalism, making it difficult for us to understand Marx's conception, but we get close to Marx's concept when we think of the creative activity of an artist. Artwork is a representation of the thought of the artist. In Marx's terms, artwork is an objectivation of the artist. However, it is also true that the process of creating the art changes the artist. Through the process of producing the art, the artist's ideas about the art change, or the artist may become aware of a new vision that needs objectivation. In addition, the completed artwork can take on a new meaning for the artist and transform the artist's conceptions of that particular work or of art in general.

Labor, even artistic labor, is in response to a need, and the transformation that labor entails also transforms our needs. The satisfaction of our needs can lead to the creation of new needs (Marx and Engels, 1845–1846/1970:43). For example, the production of cars to satisfy our need for long-distance transportation led to a new

need for highways. Even more significantly, although few people thought they needed cars when cars were first invented, now most people feel that they need them. A similar change has occurred with the computer. Whereas a generation ago few thought they needed a personal computer, now many people need one, as well as all of the software and peripherals that go with it.

We labor in response to our needs, but the labor itself transforms our needs, which can lead to new forms of productive activity. According to Marx, this transformation of our needs through labor is the engine of human history.

Not only do the objective conditions change in the act of production . . . but the producers change, too, in that they bring out new qualities in themselves, develop themselves in production, transform themselves, develop new powers and ideas, new modes of intercourse, new needs and new language.

(Marx, 1857–1858/1974:494).

Labor, for Marx, is the development of our truly human powers and potentials. By transforming material reality to fit our purpose, we also transform ourselves. Furthermore, labor is a social activity. Work involves others, directly in joint productions, or because others provide us with the necessary tools or raw materials for our work, or because they enjoy the fruits of our labor. Labor does not transform only the individual human; it also transforms society. Indeed, for Marx, the emergence of a human as an individual depends on a society. Marx wrote, “Man is in the most literal sense of the word a *zoon politikon*, not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society” (1857–1858/1964:84). In addition, Marx tells us that this transformation includes even our consciousness: “Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all” (Marx and Engels, 1845–1846/1970:51). Consequently, the transformation of the individual through labor and the transformation of society are not separable.

Alienation

Although Marx believed that there is an inherent relation between labor and human nature, he thought that this relation is perverted by capitalism. He calls this perverted relation *alienation* (Beilharz, 2005a; Cooper, 1991; Meisenhelder, 1991). The present discussion of Marx’s concept of human nature and of alienation is derived mainly from Marx’s early work. In his later work on the nature of capitalist society, he shied away from such a heavily philosophical term as *alienation*, yet alienation remained one of his main concerns (Barbalet, 1983:95).

Marx analyzed the peculiar form that our relation to our own labor has taken under capitalism. We no longer see our labor as an expression of our purpose. There is no objectivation. Instead, we labor in accordance with the purpose of the capitalist who hires and pays us. Rather than being an end in itself—an expression of human capabilities—labor in capitalism is reduced to being a means to an end: earning money (Marx, 1932/1964:173). Because our labor is not our own, it no longer transforms us. Instead we are alienated from our labor and therefore alienated from our true human nature.

Although it is the individual who feels alienated in capitalist society, Marx's basic analytic concern was with the structures of capitalism that cause this alienation (Israel, 1971). Marx uses the concept of alienation to reveal the devastating effect of capitalist production on human beings and on society. Of crucial significance here is the two-class system in which capitalists employ workers (and thereby own workers' labor time) and capitalists own the means of production (tools and raw materials) as well as the ultimate products. To survive, workers are forced to sell their labor time to capitalists. These structures, especially the division of labor, are the sociological basis of alienation.

First, the fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor therefore is not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it.

(Marx, 1850/1964:72)

As a result, people feel freely active only in their animal functions—eating, drinking, procreating. In the essentially human process of labor, they no longer feel themselves to be anything but animals. What is animal becomes human, and what is human becomes animal. Certainly eating, drinking, procreating, and so on are human functions, but when separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they become animal functions.

Alienation can be seen as having four basic components.

1. Workers in capitalist society are alienated from their *productive activity*. They do not produce objects according to their own ideas or to directly satisfy their own needs. Instead, workers work for capitalists, who pay them a subsistence wage in return for the right to use them in any way they see fit. Because productive activity belongs to the capitalists, and because they decide what is to be done with it, we can say that workers are alienated from that activity. Furthermore, many workers who perform highly specialized tasks have little sense of their role in the total production process. For example, automobile assembly-line workers who tighten a few bolts on an engine may have little feel for how their labor contributes to the production of the entire car. They do not objectivate their ideas, and they are not transformed by the labor in any meaningful way. Instead of being a process that is satisfying in and of itself, productive activity in capitalism is reduced, Marx argued, to an often boring and stultifying means to the fulfillment of the only end that really matters in capitalism: earning enough money to survive.
2. Workers in capitalist society are alienated not only from productive activities but also from the object of those activities—the *product*. The product of their labor belongs not to the workers but to the capitalists, who may use it in any way they wish because it is the capitalists' private property. Marx (1932/1964:117) tells us, "Private property is thus the product, the result, the necessary consequence of alienated labour." The capitalist will use his or her ownership in order to sell the product for a profit.

If workers wish to own the product of their own labor, they must buy it like anyone else. No matter how desperate the workers' needs, they cannot use the products of their own labor to satisfy their needs. Even workers in a bakery can starve if they don't have the money to buy the bread that they make. Because of this peculiar relation, things that we buy—that are made by others—seem to us to be more an expression of ourselves than do the things we make at our jobs. People's personalities are judged more by the cars they drive, the clothes they wear, the gadgets they use—none of which they have made—than by what they actually produce in their daily work, which appears to be an arbitrary and accidental means for making money in order to buy things.

3. Workers in capitalist society are alienated from their *fellow workers*. Marx's assumption was that people basically need and want to work cooperatively in order to appropriate from nature what they require to survive. But in capitalism this cooperation is disrupted, and people, often strangers, are forced to work side by side for the capitalist. Even if the workers on the assembly line are close friends, the nature of the technology makes for a great deal of isolation. Here is the way one worker describes his social situation on the assembly line:

You can work next to a guy for months without even knowing his name. One thing, you're too busy to talk. Can't hear . . . You have to holler in his ear. They got these little guys coming around in white shirts and if they see you runnin' your mouth, they say, "This guy needs more work." Man, he's got no time to talk.

(Terkel, 1974:165)

Of course, much the same is true in the newest version of the assembly line: the office cubicle. But in this social situation, workers experience something worse than simple isolation. Workers often are forced into outright competition, and sometimes conflict, with one another. To extract maximum productivity and to prevent the development of cooperative relationships, the capitalist pits one worker against another to see who can produce more, work more quickly, or please the boss more. The workers who succeed are given a few extra rewards; those who fail are discarded. In either case, considerable hostility is generated among the workers toward their peers. This is useful to the capitalists because it tends to deflect hostility that otherwise would be aimed at them. The isolation and the interpersonal hostility tend to alienate workers in capitalism from their fellow workers.

4. Workers in capitalist society are alienated from their own *human potential*. Instead of being a source of transformation and fulfillment of our human nature, the workplace is where we feel least human, least ourselves. Individuals perform less and less like human beings as they are reduced in their work to functioning like machines. Even smiles and greetings are programmed and scripted. Consciousness is numbed and, ultimately, destroyed as relations with other humans and with nature are progressively controlled. The result is a mass of people unable to express their essential human qualities, a mass of alienated workers.

Alienation is an example of the sort of contradiction that Marx's dialectical approach focused on. There is a real contradiction between human nature, which is defined and transformed by labor, and the actual social conditions of labor under

capitalism. What Marx wanted to stress is that this contradiction cannot be resolved merely in thought. We are not any less alienated because we identify with our employer or with the things that our wages can purchase. Indeed, these things are a symptom of our alienation, which can be resolved only through real social change.

The Structures of Capitalist Society

In Europe in Marx's time, industrialization was increasing. People were being forced to leave agricultural and artisan trades and to work in factories where conditions were often harsh. By the 1840s, when Marx was entering his most productive period, Europe was experiencing a widespread sense of social crisis (Seigel, 1978:106). In 1848 a series of revolts swept across Europe (soon after the publication of Marx and Engel's *Communist Manifesto*). The effects of industrialization and the political implications of industrialization were especially apparent in the mostly rural states collectively referred to as Germany.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, cheap manufactured goods from England and France began to force out of business the less efficient manufacturers in Germany. In response, the political leaders of the German states imposed capitalism on their still mainly feudal societies. The resulting poverty, dislocation, and alienation were particularly evident because of the rapidity of the change.

Marx's analysis of alienation was a response to the economic, social, and political changes that Marx saw going on around him. He did not view alienation as a philosophical problem. He wanted to understand what changes would be needed to create a society in which human potential could be adequately expressed. Marx's important insight was that the capitalist economic system is the primary cause of alienation. Marx's work on human nature and alienation led him to a critique of capitalist society and to a political program oriented to overcoming the structures of capitalism so that people could express their essential humanity (Mészáros, 1970).

Capitalism is an economic system in which great numbers of workers who own little produce commodities for the profit of small numbers of capitalists who own all of the following: the commodities, the means of producing the commodities, and the labor time of the workers, which they purchase through wages (H. Wolf, 2005b). One of Marx's central insights is that capitalism is much more than an economic system. It is also a system of power. The secret of capitalism is that political powers have been transformed into economic relations (Wood, 1995). Capitalists seldom need to use brute force. Capitalists are able to coerce workers through their power to dismiss workers and close plants. Capitalism, therefore, is not simply an economic system; it is also a political system, a mode of exercising power, and a process for exploiting workers.

In a capitalist system, the economy seems to be a natural force. People are laid off, wages are reduced, and factories are closed because of "the economy." We do not see these events as the outcomes of social or political decisions. Links between human suffering and the economic structures are deemed irrelevant or trivial.

For example, you might read in the newspaper that the Federal Reserve Board of the United States has raised interest rates. A reason often given for this action is that the economy is “overheated,” which is to say that there is the possibility of inflation. Raising interest rates does indeed “cool off?” the economy. How does it do so? It puts some people out of work. As a result, workers become afraid to demand higher wages, which might get passed on as higher prices, which might lead to additional interest-rate increases and to still more workers losing their jobs. Thus, inflation is averted. By raising interest rates, the Federal Reserve Board adopts a policy that helps capitalists and hurts workers. This decision, however, usually is presented as a purely economic one. Marx would say that it is a political decision that favors capitalists at the expense of workers.

Marx’s aim is to make the social and political structures of the economy clearer by revealing “the economic law of motion of modern society” (quoted in Ollman, 1976:168). Furthermore, Marx intends to reveal the internal contradictions that he hopes will inevitably transform capitalism.

Commodities

The basis of all of Marx’s work on social structures, and the place in which that work is most clearly tied to his views on human potential, is his analysis of commodities, or products of labor intended primarily for exchange. As Georg Lukács (1922/1968:83) put it, “The problem of commodities is . . . the central, structural problem of capitalist society.” By starting with the commodity, Marx is able to reveal the nature of capitalism.

Marx’s view of the commodity was rooted in his materialist orientation, with its focus on the productive activities of actors. As we saw earlier, it was Marx’s view that in their interactions with nature and with other actors, people produce the objects that they need in order to survive. These objects are produced for personal use or for use by others in the immediate environment. Such uses are what Marx called the commodity’s *use value*. However, in capitalism this process takes on a new and dangerous form. Instead of producing for themselves or for their immediate associates, the actors produce for someone else (the capitalist). The products have *exchange value*; that is, instead of being used immediately, they are exchanged in the market for money or for other objects.

Use value is connected to the intimate relation between human needs and the actual objects that can satisfy those needs. It is difficult to compare the use values of different things. Bread has the use value of satisfying hunger; shoes have the use value of protecting our feet. It is difficult to say that one has more use value than the other. They are *qualitatively* different. Furthermore, use value is tied to the physical properties of a commodity. Shoes cannot satisfy our hunger and bread cannot protect our feet because they are physically different kinds of objects. In the process of exchange, however, different commodities are compared to one another. One pair of shoes can be exchanged for six loaves of bread. Or if the medium of exchange is money, as is common, a pair of shoes can be worth six times as much money as a loaf of bread. Exchange values are *quantitatively* different. One can say that a pair of shoes has more exchange value than a loaf of bread. Furthermore, exchange value is separate from the physical

property of the commodity. Only things that can be eaten can have the use value of satisfying hunger, but any type of thing can have the exchange value of a dollar.

Fetishism of Commodities

Commodities are the products of human labor, but they can become separated from the needs and purposes of their creators. Because exchange value floats free from the actual commodity and seems to exist in a realm separate from any human use, we are led to believe that these objects and the market for them have independent existences. In fully developed capitalism, this belief becomes reality as the objects and their markets actually become real, independent phenomena. The commodity takes on an independent, almost mystical external reality (Marx, 1867/1967:35). Marx called this process the *fetishism of commodities* (Dant, 1996; Sherlock, 1997). Marx did not mean that commodities take on sexual meanings, for he wrote before Freud gave the term *fetish* this twist. Marx was alluding to the ways in which the practitioners of some religions, such as the Zunis, carve figures and then worship them. By fetish, Marx meant a thing that we ourselves make and then worship as if it were a god.

In capitalism, the products that we make, their values, and the economy that consists of our exchanges all seem to take on lives of their own, separate from any human needs or decisions. Even our own labor—the thing that, according to Marx, makes us truly human—becomes a commodity that is bought and sold. Our labor acquires an exchange value that is separate from us. It is turned into an abstract thing and used by the capitalist to make the objects that come to dominate us. Hence, commodities are the source of the alienation discussed above. Even the labor of self-employed commodity producers is alienated, because they must produce for the market instead of to achieve their own purposes and satisfy their own needs.

Thus, the economy takes on a function that Marx believed only actors could perform: the production of value. For Marx, the true value of a thing comes from the fact that labor produces it and someone needs it. A commodity's true value represents human social relations. In contrast, in capitalism, Marx tells us, "A definite social relation between men . . . assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things" (1867/1967:72). Granting reality to commodities and to the market, the individual in capitalism progressively loses control over them. A commodity, therefore, is "a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor: because the relations of the producers to the sum total of their own labor is presented to them as a social relation, existing not between themselves, but between the products of their labor" (Marx, 1867/1967:72).

Think, for example, of the cup of coffee that you might have bought before sitting down to read this text. In that simple transaction, you entered into a relationship with hundreds of others: the waitperson, the owner of the coffee shop, the people working at the roaster, the importer, the truck driver, dockworkers, all the people on the ship that brought the beans, the coffee plantation owner, the pickers, and so on. In addition, you supported a particular trading relation between countries, a particular form of government in the grower's country that has been historically shaped by the coffee trade, a particular

relation between the plantation owner and the worker, and many other social relations. You did all this by exchanging money for a cup of coffee. In the relation between those objects—money and coffee—lies hidden all those social relations.

Marx's discussion of commodities and their fetishism takes us from the level of the individual actor to the level of large-scale social structures. The fetishism of commodities imparts to the economy an independent, objective reality that is external to, and coercive of, the actor. Looked at in this way, the fetishism of commodities is translated into the concept of *reification* (Lukács, 1922/1968; Sherlock, 1997). Reification can be thought of as “thingification,” or the process of coming to believe that humanly created social forms are natural, universal, and absolute things. As a result of reification, social forms do acquire those characteristics. The concept of reification implies that people believe that social structures are beyond their control and unchangeable. Reification occurs when this belief becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Then structures actually do acquire the character people endowed them with. People become mesmerized by the seeming objectivity and authority of the economy. People lose their jobs, make career choices, or move across the country because of the economy. According to Marx, however, the economy is not an objective, natural thing. It is a form of domination, and decisions about interest rates and layoffs are political decisions that tend to benefit one group over another.

People reify the whole range of social relationships and social structures. Just as people reify commodities and other economic phenomena (for example, the division of labor [Rattansi, 1982; Wallimann, 1981]), they also reify religious (Barbalet, 1983:147), political, and organizational structures. Marx made a similar point in reference to the state: “And out of this very contradiction between the individual and . . . the community the latter takes an independent form as the State, divorced from the real interests of individual and community” (cited in Bender, 1970:176). Capitalism is made up of particular types of social relations that tend to take forms that appear to be and eventually are independent of the actual people involved. As Moishe Postone (1993:4) tells us, “The result is a new, increasingly abstract form of social domination—one that subjects people to impersonal structural imperatives and constraints that cannot be adequately grasped in terms of concrete domination (e.g., personal or group domination).”

Capital, Capitalists, and the Proletariat

Marx found the heart of capitalist society within the commodity. A society dominated by objects whose main value is exchange produces certain categories of people. The two main types that concerned Marx were the proletariat and the capitalist. Let us start with the proletariat.

Workers who sell their labor and do not own their own means of production are members of the proletariat. They do not own their own tools or their factories. Marx (1867/1967:714–715) believed that proletarians would eventually lose their own skills as they increasingly serviced machines that had their skills built into them. Because members of the proletariat produce only for exchange, they are also consumers. Because they don't have the means to produce for their own needs, they must use their wages to buy what they need. Consequently, proletarians are completely dependent on their wages in order to live. This makes the proletariat dependent on those who pay the wages.

Those who pay the wages are the capitalists. Capitalists are those who own the means of production. Before we can fully understand capitalists, we must first understand capital itself (H. Wolf, 2005a). Capital is money that produces more money, capital is money that is invested rather than being used to satisfy human needs or desires. This distinction becomes clearer when we look at what Marx considered to be “the starting-point of capital” (1867/1967:146): the *circulation of commodities*. Marx discussed two types of circulation of commodities. One type of circulation is characteristic of capital: Money \rightarrow Commodities \rightarrow (a larger sum of) Money (M_1 -C- M_2). The other type is not: Commodities \rightarrow Money \rightarrow Commodities (C_1 -M- C_2).

In a noncapitalist circulation of commodities, the circuit C_1 -M- C_2 predominates. An example of C_1 -M- C_2 would be a fisherman who sells his catch (C_1) and then uses the money (M) to buy bread (C_2). The primary goal of exchange in noncapitalist circulation is a commodity that one can use and enjoy.

In a capitalist circulation of commodities (M_1 -C- M_2), the primary goal is to produce more money. Commodities are purchased in order to generate profit, not necessarily for use. In the capitalist circuit, referred to by Marx as “buying in order to sell” (1867/1967:147), the individual actor buys a commodity with money and in turn exchanges the commodity for presumably more money. For example, a store owner would buy (M_1) the fish (C) in order to sell them for more money (M_2). To further increase profits, the store owner might buy the boat and fishing equipment and pay the fisherman a wage. The goal of this circuit is not the consumption of the use value, as it is in the simple circulation of commodities. The goal is more money. The particular properties of the commodity used to make money are irrelevant. The commodity can be fish or it can be labor. Also, the real needs and desires of human beings are irrelevant; all that matters is what will produce more money.

Capital is money that produces more money, but Marx tells us it is more than that: it is also a particular social relation. Money becomes capital only because of a social relation between, on the one hand, the proletariat, which does the work and must purchase the product, and, on the other hand, those who have invested the money. The capacity of capital to generate profit appears “as a power endowed by Nature—a productive power that is immanent in Capital” (1867/1967:333); but, according to Marx, it is a relation of power. Capital cannot increase except by exploiting those who actually do the work. The workers are exploited by a system, and the irony is that the system is produced through the workers’ own labor. The capitalist system is the social structure that emerges from that exploitive relationship.

Capitalists are those who live off the profit of capital. They are the beneficiaries of the proletariat’s exploitation. Within the idea of capital is contained a social relation between those who own the means of production and those whose wage labor is exploited.

Exploitation

For Marx, exploitation and domination reflect more than an accidentally unequal distribution of wealth and power. *Exploitation* is a necessary part of the capitalist economy. All societies have exploitation, but what is peculiar in capitalism is that the

exploitation is accomplished by the impersonal and “objective” economic system. It seems to be less a matter of power and more a matter of economists’ charts and figures. Furthermore, the coercion is rarely naked force and is instead the worker’s own needs, which can now be satisfied only through wage labor. Dripping irony, Marx describes the freedom of this wage labor:

For the conversion of his money into capital . . . the owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything necessary for the realization of his labour-power.

(Marx, 1867/1967:169)

Workers appear to be “free laborers,” entering into free contracts with capitalists. But Marx believed that the workers must accept the terms the capitalists offer them, because the workers can no longer produce for their own needs. This is especially true because capitalism usually creates what Marx referred to as a *reserve army* of the unemployed. If a worker does not want to do a job at the wage the capitalist offers, someone else in the reserve army of the unemployed will. This, for example, is what Barbara Ehrenreich discovered is the purpose of many of the want ads for low-paying jobs:

Only later will I realize that the want ads are not a reliable measure of the actual jobs available at any particular time. They are . . . the employers’ insurance policy against the relentless turnover of the low-wage workforce. Most of the big hotels run ads almost continually if only to build a supply of applicants to replace the current workers as they drift away or are fired.

(Ehrenreich, 2001:15)

The capitalists pay the workers less than the value that the workers produce and keep the rest for themselves. This *practice* leads us to Marx’s central concept of *surplus value*, which is defined as the difference between the value of the product when it is sold and the value of the elements consumed in the formation of that product (including the worker’s labor). The capitalists can use this profit for private consumption, but doing so would not lead to the expansion of capitalism. Rather, capitalists expand their enterprises by converting profit into a base for the creation of still more surplus value.

It should be stressed that surplus value is not simply an economic concept. Surplus value, like capital, is a particular social relation and a form of domination, because labor is the real source of surplus value. “The rate of surplus-value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labor-power by capital, or of the laborer by the capitalist” (Marx, 1867/1967:218). This observation points to one of Marx’s more colorful metaphors: “Capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks” (1867/1967:233).

Marx (1857–1858/1974:414) makes one other important point about capital: “Capital exists and can only exist as many capitals.” What he means is that capitalism is always driven by incessant competition. Capitalists may seem to be in control, but even they are driven by the constant competition between capitals. The capitalist is driven to make more profit in order to accumulate and invest more capital. The capitalist who does not do this will be outcompeted by others who do. “As such, he shares with the miser an absolute drive towards self-enrichment. But what appears in the

miser as the mania of an individual is in the capitalist the effect of a social mechanism in which he is merely a cog” (Marx, 1867/1967:739).

The desire for more profit and more surplus value for expansion pushes capitalism toward what Marx called the *general law of capitalist accumulation*. Capitalists seek to exploit workers as much as possible: “The constant tendency of capital is to force the cost of labor back towards . . . zero” (Marx, 1867/1967:600). Marx basically argued that the structure and the ethos of capitalism push capitalists in the direction of the accumulation of more and more capital. Given Marx’s view that labor is the source of value, capitalists are led to intensify the exploitation of the proletariat, thereby driving class conflict.

Class Conflict

Marx often used the term *class* in his writings, but he never systematically defined what he meant (So and Suwarsono, 1990:35). He usually is taken to have meant a group of people in similar situations with respect to their control of the means of production. This, however, is not a complete description of the way Marx used the term. *Class*, for Marx, was always defined in terms of its potential for conflict. Individuals form a class insofar as they are in a common conflict with others over the surplus value. In capitalism there is an inherent conflict of interest between those who hire wage laborers and those whose labor is turned into surplus value. It is this inherent conflict that produces classes (Ollman, 1976).

Because class is defined by the potential for conflict, it is a theoretical and historically variant concept. A theory about where potential conflict exists in a society is required before identifying a class.⁴ Richard Miller (1991:99) tells us that “there is no rule that could, in principle, be used to sort out people in a society into classes without studying the actual interactions among economic processes on the one hand and between political and cultural processes on the other.”

For Marx, a class truly exists only when people become aware of their conflicting relation to other classes. Without this awareness, they only constitute what Marx called a class *in itself*. When they become aware of the conflict, they become a true class, a class *for itself*.

In capitalism, Marx’s analysis discovered two primary classes: bourgeoisie and proletariat.⁵ Bourgeoisie is Marx’s name for capitalists in the modern economy. The bourgeoisie owns the means of production and employs wage labor. The conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is another example of a real material contradiction. This contradiction grows out of the previously mentioned contradiction between labor and capitalism. None of these contradictions can be resolved except by changing the capitalist structure. In fact, until that change occurs, the contradiction will only become worse. Society will be increasingly polarized into these two great opposing classes.

⁴ Marx did acknowledge that class conflict often is affected by other forms of stratification, such as ethnic, racial, gender, and religious; however, he did not accept that these could be primary.

⁵ Although his theoretical work looked mainly at these two classes, his historical studies examined a number of different class formations. Most significant are the petty bourgeois—small shopkeepers employing at most a few workers—and the lumpenproletariat—the proletariat who readily sell out to the capitalists. For Marx, these other classes can be understood only in terms of the primary relationship between bourgeoisie and proletariat.

Competition with megastores and franchise chains will shut down many small, independent businesses; mechanization will replace skilled artisans; and even some capitalists will be squeezed out through attempts to establish monopolies, for example, by means of mergers. All these displaced people will be forced down into the ranks of the proletariat. Marx called this inevitable increase in the proletariat *proletarianization*.

In addition, because capitalists have already reduced the workers to laboring machines performing a series of simple operations, mechanization becomes increasingly easy. As mechanization proceeds, more and more people are put out of work and fall from the proletariat into the industrial reserve army. In the end, Marx foresaw a situation in which society would be characterized by a tiny number of exploitative capitalists and a huge mass of proletarians and members of the industrial reserve army. By reducing so many people to this condition, capitalism creates the masses that will lead to its own overthrow. The increased centralization of factory work, as well as the shared suffering, increases the possibility of an organized resistance to capitalism. Furthermore, the international linking of factories and markets encourages workers to be aware of more than their own local interests. This awareness is likely to lead to revolution.

The capitalists, of course, seek to forestall this revolution. For example, they sponsor colonial adventures with the objective of shifting at least some of the burden of exploitation from the home front to the colonies. However, in Marx's view (1867/1967:10), these efforts are doomed to failure because the capitalist is as much controlled by the laws of the capitalist economy as are the workers. Capitalists are under competitive pressure from one another, forcing each to try to reduce labor costs and intensify exploitation—even though this intensified exploitation will increase the likelihood of revolution and therefore contribute to the capitalists' demise. Even good-hearted capitalists will be forced to further exploit their workers in order to compete: "The law of capitalist accumulation, metamorphosed by economists into pretended law of nature, in reality merely states that the very nature of accumulation excludes every diminution in the degree of exploitation" (Marx, 1867/1967:582).

Though not a Marxist, Robert Reich, a former U.S. secretary of labor, echoes Marx's analysis that it is not the evil of individual capitalists but the capitalist system itself that explains the increasing layoffs in America and the movement of manufacturing to take advantage of cheaper overseas labor:

It's tempting to conclude from all this that enterprises are becoming colder-hearted, and executives more ruthless—and to blame it on an ethic of unbridled greed that seems to have taken hold in recent years and appears to be increasing. But this conclusion would be inaccurate. The underlying cause isn't a change in the American character. It is to be found in the increasing ease by which buyers and investors can get better deals, and the competitive pressure this imposes on all enterprises.

(Reich, 2000:71)

Whether they want to or not, capitalists must move their factories where labor is cheaper; they must exploit workers. A capitalist who does not will not be able to compete with capitalists who do.

Marx usually did not blame individual members of the bourgeoisie for their actions; he saw these actions as largely determined by the logic of the capitalist system. This is consistent with his view that actors in capitalism generally are devoid

of creative independence.⁶ However, the developmental process inherent in capitalism provides the conditions necessary for the ultimate reemergence of such creative action and, with it, the overthrow of the capitalist system. The logic of the capitalist system is forcing the capitalists to produce more exploited proletarians, and these are the very people who will bring an end to capitalism through their revolt. “What the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, is, above all, its own gravediggers” (Marx and Engels, 1848/1948).

It is not only the ultimate proletariat revolution that Marx sees as caused by the underlying contradictions of capitalism, but also many of the various personal and social crises that beset modern society. On the personal side, we have already discussed some of the facets of the alienation that Marx believed was at the root of the feeling of meaninglessness in so many people’s lives. At the economic level, Marx predicted a series of booms and depressions as capitalists overproduced or laid off workers in their attempts to increase their profits. At the political level, Marx predicted the increasing inability of a civil society to discuss and solve social problems. Instead we would see the growth of a state whose only purposes are the protection of the capitalists’ private property and an occasional brutal intervention when economic coercion by the capitalists fails.

Capitalism as a Good Thing

Despite his focus on the inevitable crises of capitalism and his portrayal of it as a system of domination and exploitation, Marx saw capitalism as primarily a good thing. Certainly, Marx did not want to return to the traditional values of precapitalism. Past generations were just as exploited; the only difference is that the old exploitation was not veiled behind an economic system. The birth of capitalism opened up new possibilities for the freedom of the workers. Notwithstanding its exploitation, the capitalist system provides the possibility for freedom from the traditions that bound all previous societies. Even if the worker is not yet truly free, the promise is there. Similarly, as the most powerful economic system ever developed, capitalism holds the promise of freedom from hunger and from other forms of material deprivation. It was from the viewpoint of these promises that Marx criticized capitalism.

In addition, Marx believed that capitalism is the root cause of the defining characteristics of the modern age. Modernity’s constant change and propensity to challenge all accepted traditions are driven by the inherent competition of capitalism, which pushes capitalists to continuously revolutionize the means of production and transform society:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.

(Marx and Engels, 1848/1948:11)

⁶ Marx might be seen as an exception to his own theory. He does acknowledge that it is possible for some individuals among the bourgeoisie to lay aside their class characteristics and adopt a communist consciousness (Marx and Engels, 1845–1846/1970:69).

Capitalism has been a truly revolutionary force. It has created a global society; it has introduced unrelenting technological change; it has overthrown the traditional world. But now, Marx believed, it must be overthrown. Capitalism's role is finished, and it is time for the new stage of communism to begin.

Materialist Conception of History

Marx was able to criticize capitalism from the perspective of its future because of his belief that history would follow a predictable course. This belief was based on his materialist conception of history (often simply shortened to the term *historical materialism* [Vandenbergh, 2005]). The general claim of Marx's historical materialism is that the way in which people provide for their material needs determines or, in general, conditions the relations that people have with each other, their social institutions, and even their prevalent ideas.⁷

Because of the importance of the way in which people provide for their material needs, this, along with the resultant economic relations, is often referred to as the *base*. Noneconomic relations, other social institutions, and prevalent ideas are referred to as the *superstructure*. It should be noted that Marx's view of history does not envision a straightforward trend in which the superstructure simply comes into line with the base. Human history is set into motion by the attempt to satisfy needs, but as noted above, these needs themselves are historically changing. Consequently, advances in the satisfaction of needs tend to produce more needs so that human needs are both the motivating foundation and the result of the economic base.

The following quotation is one of Marx's best summaries of his materialist conception of history:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will. These relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, which is the real foundation on top of which arises a legal and political superstructure to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come in conflict with the existing relations of production or—what is but a legal expression of the same thing—with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then occurs a period of social revolution. With the change of the economic foundation the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed.

(Marx, 1859/1970:20–21)

⁷ Antonio (2000:119–120) distinguishes between a hard and a soft material determinism. "Although hard determinist passages exist in Marx's texts, he suggested much more often a complex, historically contingent materialism, which ought not to be reduced to 'technological determinism' (i.e., social change arises from technical change) or to 'reflection theory' (i.e., ideas are mere emanations of material reality)."

The place to start in that quotation is with the “material forces of production.” These are the actual tools, machinery, factories, and so forth used to satisfy human needs. The “relations of production” are the kinds of associations that people have with each other in satisfying their needs.

Marx’s theory holds that a society will tend to adopt the system of social relations that best facilitates the employment and development of its productive powers. Therefore, the relations of production correspond to the state of the material forces of production. For example, certain stages of low technology correspond to social relations characterized by a few large landowners and a large number of serfs who work the land in return for a share of the produce. The higher technology of capitalism corresponds to a few capitalists who are able to invest in the expensive machinery and factories and a large number of wage workers. As Marx succinctly, if somewhat simplistically, puts it, “the hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the capitalist” (Marx, 1847/1963:95). Marx adds that these relations between people also can be expressed as property relations: the capitalist owns the means of production, and the wage laborer does not.

Capitalist economies foster unique relations between people and create certain expectations, obligations, and duties. For example, wage laborers must show a certain deference to capitalists if they want to keep their jobs. For Marx, what was important about these relations of production was their propensity to class conflict, but it is also possible to see the effect of the relations of production in family and personal relations. The socialization necessary to produce the “good” male worker also produces a certain type of husband. Similarly, early capitalism’s requirement that the man leave the home to work all day led to a definition of the mother as the primary caretaker of the children. Hence, changes in the forces of production led to deep changes in the family structure. These changes too can be seen as relations of production.

Marx is never quite clear about where the relations of production leave off and the superstructure starts. However, he clearly felt that some relations and forms of “social consciousness” play only a supporting role in the material means of production. Marx predicted that although these elements of the superstructure are not directly involved, they tend to take a form that will support the relations of production.

Marx’s view of history was a dynamic one, and he therefore believed that the forces of production will change to better provide for material needs. For example, this is what happened with the advent of capitalism, when technological changes made factories possible. However, before capitalism could actually occur, there had to be changes in society, changes in the relations of production. Factories, capitalists, and wage laborers were not compatible with feudal relations. The feudal lords, who derived their wealth solely from the ownership of land and who felt a moral obligation to provide for their serfs, had to be replaced by capitalists who derived their wealth from capital and who felt no moral obligation to wage laborers. Similarly, the serf’s feeling of personal loyalty to the lord had to be replaced by proletarians’ willingness to sell their labor to whoever will pay. The old relations of production were in conflict with the new forces of production.

A revolution is often required to change the relations of production. The main source of revolution is the material contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production. However, revolution also results from another contradiction: between exploiters and the exploited. According to Marx, this contradiction, which

has always existed, leads to revolutionary change when the exploited line up in support of a change in the relations of production that favors changes occurring in the forces of production. Marx did not believe that all workers' revolts could be effective, only those in support of a change in the forces of production. An effective revolution, according to Marx, will cause the supporting relations, institutions, and prevalent ideas to change so that they validate the new relations of production.

Cultural Aspects of Capitalist Society

In addition to his focus on the material structures of capitalism, Marx also theorized about its cultural aspects.

Ideology

Not only do the existing relations of production tend to prevent changes necessary for the development of the forces of production, but similarly, the supporting relations, institutions, and, in particular, prevalent ideas also tend to prevent these changes. Marx called prevalent ideas that perform this function *ideologies*. As with many terms, Marx is not always precise in his use of the word *ideology*. He seems to use it to indicate two related sorts of ideas.

First, *ideology* refers to ideas that naturally emerge out of everyday life in capitalism but, because of the nature of capitalism, reflect reality in an inverted manner (Larrain, 1979). To explain this meaning of the term, Marx used the metaphor of a camera obscura, which employs an optical quirk to show a real image reflected upside down. This is the type of ideology represented by the fetishism of commodities or by money. Even though we know that money is nothing but a piece of paper that has value only because of underlying social relations, in our daily lives we treat money as though it had inherent value. Instead of our seeing that we give money its value, it often seems that money gives us our value.

This first type of ideology is vulnerable to disruption because it is based on underlying material contradictions. Human value is not really dependent on money, and we often meet people who are living proof of that contradiction. In fact, it is at this level that we usually become aware of the material contradictions that Marx believed will drive capitalism to the next phase. We become aware, for example, that the economy is not an objective, independent system, but a political sphere. We become aware that our labor is not just another commodity and that its sale for wages produces alienation. Or if we don't become aware of the underlying truth, we at least become aware of the disruption because of a blatantly political move in the economic system or our own feeling of alienation. It is in addressing these disruptions that Marx's second use of *ideology* is relevant.

When disruptions occur and the underlying material contradictions are revealed, or are in danger of being revealed, the second type of ideology will emerge. Here Marx uses the term *ideology* to refer to systems of ruling ideas that attempt once again to hide the contradictions that are at the heart of the capitalist system. In most cases, they do this in one of three ways: (1) They lead to the creation of subsystems of ideas—a religion, a philosophy, a literature, a legal system—that makes the

contradictions appear to be coherent. (2) They explain away those experiences that reveal the contradictions, usually as personal problems or individual idiosyncrasies. Or (3) they present the capitalist contradiction as really being a contradiction in human nature and therefore one that cannot be fixed by social change.

In general, members of the ruling class create this second type of ideology. For example, Marx refers to bourgeois economists who present the commodity form as natural and universal. Or he criticizes bourgeois philosophers, such as Hegel, for pretending that material contradictions can be resolved by changing how we think. However, even the proletariat can create this type of ideology. People who have given up the hope of actually changing society need such ideologies. But no matter who creates them, these ideologies always benefit the ruling class by hiding the contradictions that would lead to social change.

Freedom, Equality, and Ideology

For an example of ideology, we will look at Marx's ideas about the bourgeois conception of equality and freedom. According to Marx, our particular ideas of equality and freedom emerge out of capitalism. Although we take our belief in freedom and equality to be an obvious thing, any historical study will demonstrate that it is not. Most societies would have considered the idea that all people are essentially equal as absurd. For most cultures throughout history, slavery seemed quite natural. Now, under capitalism, we believe quite the opposite: inequality is absurd, and slavery is unnatural.

Marx thought that this change in our ideas could be traced to the everyday practices of capitalism. The act of exchange, which is the basis of capitalism, presupposes the equality of the people in the exchange, just as it presupposes the equality of the commodities in the exchange. For the commodities, the particular qualitative differences of their use values are hidden by their exchange value. In other words, apples and oranges are made equal by reducing them to their monetary value. The same thing happens to the differences between the people involved in the exchange. Most exchanges in advanced capitalism involve people who never meet and don't know each other. We don't care who grew the apples and oranges we buy. This anonymity and indifference constitutes a kind of equality.

Furthermore, freedom is assumed in this exchange, since any of the partners to the exchange are presumed to be free to exchange or not as they see fit. The very idea of capitalist exchange means that commodities are not taken by force but are freely traded. This is also true of the exchange of labor time for wages. It is assumed that the worker or the employer is free to enter into the exchange and free to terminate it. Marx (1857–1858/1974:245) concludes that “equality and freedom are not only respected in exchange which is based on exchange values, but the exchange of exchange values is the real productive basis of all equality and freedom.” Nevertheless, Marx believed that capitalist practices result in an inverted view of freedom. It seems that we are free; but in fact, it is capital that is free and we who are enslaved.

According to Marx, freedom is the ability to have control over your own labor and its products. Although individuals may seem free under capitalism, they are not. Under previous social forms, people were directly dominated by others and so were aware of their unfreedom. Under capitalism, people are dominated by capitalist

relations that seem objective and natural and therefore are not perceived as a form of domination. Marx (1857–1858/1974:652) decries “the insipidity of the view that free competition is the ultimate development of human freedom. . . . This kind of individual freedom is therefore at the same time the most complete suspension of all individual freedom, and the most complete subjugation of individuality under social conditions which assume the form of objective powers.”

Because the capitalist owns the means of production, the exchange of wages for labor time cannot be free. The proletariat must work in order to live, but the capitalist has the choice to hire others from the reserve army of labor, or to mechanize, or to let the factory sit idle until the workers become desperate enough to “freely” accept the capitalist’s wages. The worker is neither free nor equal to the capitalist.

Hence, we see that the first level of the ideology of freedom and equality emerges from the practices of exchange in capitalism, but that our ideas are inverted and do not represent real freedom and equality. It is capital that is freely and equally exchanged; it is capital that is accepted without prejudice; it is capital that is able to do as it wishes, not us. This first type of ideology is easily disrupted, and our awareness of this disruption drives capitalism to the next phase. Despite the ideology of equality and freedom, few workers feel equal to their employers; few feel free in their jobs. This is why the second type of ideology is necessary. These disruptions somehow must be explained away or made to look inevitable.

This is especially true with the ideology of equality and freedom, because these ideas are among the most threatening to capitalism. They are another example of how capitalism creates its own gravediggers. Older forms of unfreedom and inequality were clearly tied to people, and there was hope, therefore, of becoming free and equal by changing the hearts of the people who oppressed us. When we become aware of the source of unfreedom and inequality under capitalism, we begin to realize that capitalism itself must be changed. Ideologies therefore must be created to protect the capitalist system, and one way in which they do this is by portraying inequality as equality and unfreedom as freedom.

Marx believed that the capitalist system is inherently unequal. The capitalists automatically benefit more from the capitalist system, while the workers are automatically disadvantaged. Under capitalism, those who own the means of production, those with capital, make money from their money. Under capitalism, capital begets more capital—that is, investments give a return—and as we saw above, Marx believed that this was derived from the exploitation of the workers. Not only are the workers automatically exploited, they also bear the burden of unemployment due to technological changes, geographical shifts, and other economic dislocations, all of which benefit the capitalist. The rule of capitalism is reflected in the common saying that the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Constantly increasing inequality is built into the capitalist system.

Any attempt toward a more equal society must take into account this automatic propensity of the capitalist system to increased inequality. Nevertheless, attempts to make the capitalist system more equal often are portrayed as forms of inequality. From the Marxist viewpoint these attempts would be the second form of ideology. For example, ideologues promote a “flat tax” which taxes the rich and the poor at the same rate. They argue that because the rate is the same for rich and poor, it is equal.

They ignore the fact that a graduated tax rate may be just compensation for the built-in inequality of capitalism. They create an ideology by portraying the obvious inequalities of the capitalist system as inevitable or as being due to the laziness of the poor. In this way, inequality is portrayed as equality, and the freedom of the rich to keep the fruits of exploitation trumps the freedom of the workers.

We see in this example not only the two types of ideology but also another instance of how Marx thought that capitalism is a good thing. The ideas of freedom and equality emerge from capitalism itself, and it is these ideas that drive us toward the dissolution of capitalism, toward communism.

Religion

Marx also sees religion as an ideology. He famously refers to religion as the opiate of the people, but it is worthwhile to look at the entire quotation:

Religious distress is at the same time the expression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

(Marx, 1843/1970)

Marx believed that religion, like all ideology, reflects a truth but that this truth is inverted. Because people cannot see that their distress and oppression are produced by the capitalist system, their distress and oppression are given a religious form. Marx clearly says that he is not against religion per se, but against a system that requires the illusions of religion.

This religious form is vulnerable to disruption and therefore is always liable to become the basis of a revolutionary movement. We do indeed see that religious movements have often been in the forefront of opposition to capitalism (for example, liberation theology). Nevertheless, Marx felt that religion is especially amenable to becoming the second form of ideology by portraying the injustice of capitalism as a test for the faithful and pushing any revolutionary change off into the afterlife. In this way, the cry of the oppressed is used to further oppression.

Marx's Economics: A Case Study

This chapter is devoted to an analysis of Marx's sociology, but of course it is his economics for which he is far better known. Although we have touched on a number of aspects of Marx's economics, we have not dealt with it in a coherent fashion. In this section, we look at Marx's economics, not as economics per se but rather as an exemplification of his sociological theory (Mazlish, 1984).⁸ There is much more to Marxian economics, but this is the most relevant way to deal with it in a book devoted to sociological theory.

⁸ One way of looking at Marx's economic theory (for example, the labor theory of value) is as a specific application of his more general sociological theory. This stands in contrast to G. A. Cohen's (1978) work, in which his overriding concern is the underlying *economic* theory in Marx's work. Although Cohen sees the "economic" and the "social" as being interchangeable in Marx's work, he clearly implies that Marx's economic theory is the more general.

A starting point for Marxian economics is in the concepts, previously touched on, of use value and exchange value. People have always created use values; that is, they have always produced things that directly satisfy their wants. A *use value* is defined qualitatively; that is, something either is or is not useful. An *exchange value*, however, is defined quantitatively, not qualitatively. It is defined by the amount of labor needed to appropriate useful qualities. Whereas use values are produced to satisfy one's own needs, exchange values are produced to be exchanged for values of another use. Whereas the production of use values is a natural human expression, the existence of exchange values sets in motion a process by which humanity is distorted. The entire edifice of capitalism, including commodities, the market, money, and so forth, is erected on the basis of exchange values.

To Marx, the basic source of any value was the amount of socially necessary labor-time needed to produce an article under the normal conditions of production and with the average degree of skill and intensity of the time. This is the well-known *labor theory of value*. Although it is clear that labor lies at the base of use value, this fact grows progressively less clear as we move to exchange values, commodities, the market, and capitalism. To put it another way, "The determination of the magnitude of value by labor-time is therefore a secret, hidden under the apparent fluctuations in relative values of commodities" (Marx, 1867/1967:75). Labor, as the source of all value, is a secret in capitalism that allows the capitalists to exploit the workers.

According to Peter Worsley, Marx "put at the heart of his sociology—as no other sociology does—the theme of exploitation" (1982:115). The capitalists pay the workers *less* than the value the workers produce and keep the rest for themselves. The workers are not aware of this exploitation, and often, neither are the capitalists. The capitalists believe that this extra value is derived from their own cleverness, their capital investment, their manipulation of the market, and so on. Marx stated that "so long as trade is good, the capitalist is too much absorbed in money grubbing to take notice of this gratuitous gift of labor" (1867/1967:207). In sum, Marx said:

The capitalist does not know that the normal price of labor also includes a definite quantity of unpaid labor, and that this very unpaid labor is the normal source of his gain. The category, surplus labor-time, does not exist at all for him, since it is included in the normal working-day, which he thinks he has paid for in the day's wages.

(Marx, 1867/1967:550)

This leads us to Marx's central concept of *surplus value*. This is defined as the difference between the value of the product when it is sold and the value of the elements consumed in the formation of that product. Although means of production (raw materials and tools, the value of which comes from the labor involved in extracting or producing them) are consumed in the production process, it is labor that is the real source of surplus value. "The rate of surplus-value is therefore an exact expression for the degree of exploitation of labor-power by capital, or of the laborer by the capitalist" (Marx, 1867/1967:218). This points to one of Marx's more colorful metaphors: "Capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" (1867/1967:233).

The surplus derived from this process is used by the capitalists to pay for such things as rent to landowners and interest to banks. But the most important derivation from it is profit. The capitalists can use this profit for private consumption, but that would not lead to the expansion of capitalism. Rather they expand their enterprise by converting it into a base for the creation of still more surplus value.

The desire for more profit and more surplus value for expansion pushes capitalism toward what Marx called the *general law of capitalist accumulation*. The capitalists seek to exploit workers as much as possible: "The constant tendency of capital is to force the cost of labor back towards . . . zero" (Marx, 1867/1967:600). Marx basically argued that the structure and the ethos of capitalism push the capitalists in the direction of the accumulation of more and more capital. In order to do this, given Marx's view that labor is the source of value, the capitalists are led to intensify the exploitation of the proletariat. Ultimately, however, increased exploitation yields fewer and fewer gains; an upper limit of exploitation is reached. In addition, as this limit is approached, the government is forced by pressure from the working class to place restrictions on the actions of capitalists (for example, laws limiting the length of the workday). As a result of these restrictions, the capitalists must look for other devices, and a major one is the substitution of machines for people. This substitution is made relatively easy, because the capitalists already have reduced the workers to laboring machines performing a series of simple operations. This shift to capital-intensive production is, paradoxically, a cause of the declining rate of profit since it is labor (not machines) which is the ultimate source of profit.

As mechanization proceeds, more and more people are put out of work and fall from the proletariat to the "industrial reserve army." At the same time, heightening competition and the burgeoning costs of technology lead to a progressive decline in the number of capitalists. In the end, Marx foresaw a situation in which society would be characterized by a tiny number of exploitative capitalists and a huge mass of proletarians and members of the industrial reserve army. In these extreme circumstances, capitalism would be most vulnerable to revolution. As Marx put it, the expropriation of the masses by the capitalists would be replaced by "the expropriation of a few usurpers by the mass of people" (1867/1967:764). The capitalists, of course, seek to forestall their demise. For example, they sponsor colonial adventures with the objective of shifting at least some of the burden of exploitation from the home front to the colonies. However, in Marx's view these efforts are ultimately doomed to failure, and the capitalists will face rebellion at home and abroad.

The key point about the general law of capitalist accumulation is the degree to which actors, both capitalist and proletarian, are impelled by the structure and ethos of capitalism to do what they do. Marx usually did not blame individual capitalists for their actions; he saw these actions as largely determined by the logic of the capitalist system. This is consistent with his view that actors in capitalism generally are devoid of creative independence. However, the developmental process inherent in capitalism provides the conditions necessary for the ultimate reemergence of such creative action and, with it, the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Communism

Marx often wrote as though changes in the mode of production were inevitable, as in the quotation about the hand-mill giving you feudalism and the steam-mill giving you capitalism. Unless one wishes to find reasons for rejecting Marx's theories, it is probably best to interpret Marx's historical materialism as motivated by a desire to identify some predictable trends and to use these trends to discover the points where political action could be most effective. This is certainly the way that Marx used his theories in his concrete political and economic studies, such as *Class Struggles in France* (1850) and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1869). The truth of historical materialism, then, does not depend on the inevitability of its historical predictions, but on whether a focus on the way that we satisfy our material needs is the best way to reveal the opportunities for effective political intervention.

If the goal of Marx's materialist view of history was to predict those points where political action could be most effective, then it is his view of what changes will lead to the next stage that is most important. Marx thought that capitalism had developed its productive powers so that it was ready to enter a new mode of production, which he called *communism*. Most of his analysis dwelt on conflicts in the present that will lead to this new economic form.

Despite the importance to Marx of the future communist society, he spent surprisingly little time depicting what this world would be like. He refused to write "recipes for the kitchens of the future" (Marx, cited in T. Ball, 1991:139). The era in which Marx wrote was filled with talk of revolutions and new forms of society—of communism, socialism, anarchy, and many more now forgotten. Charismatic political leaders appeared on the historical stage and stirred audiences with their speeches. Marx, however, was intellectually opposed to painting utopian visions of the future. To Marx, the most important task was the critical analysis of contemporary capitalist society. He believed that such criticism would help bring down capitalism and create the conditions for the rise of a new socialist world. There would be time to construct communist society once capitalism was overcome. In general, however, Marx believed that communism would involve taking decisions about what is to be produced away from the reified economy that runs in the interests of the few capitalists and putting in its place some sort of social decision making that would allow the needs of the many to be taken into account.

Criticisms

Five problems in Marx's theory need to be discussed. The first is the problem of communism as it came to exist. The failure of communist societies and their turn to a more capitalistically oriented economy raise questions about the role of Marxian theory within sociology (Antonio, 2000; Aronson, 1995; Hudelson, 1993; Manuel, 1992). Marx's ideas seem to have been tried and to have failed. At one time, almost one-third of the world's population lived under states inspired by the ideas of Marx. Many of those formerly Marxist states have become capitalist, and even those (except perhaps for Cuba) that still claim to be Marxist manifest nothing but a highly bureaucratized form of capitalism.

Against this criticism, it could be argued that those states never truly followed Marxist precepts, and that it is unfair for critics to blame Marx for every misuse of his theory. However, those making the criticism claim that Marx himself insisted that Marxist theory should not be split from its actually existing practice. As Alvin Gouldner (1970:3) writes, “Having set out to change the world, rather than produce one more interpretation of it, Marxist theory must ultimately be weighed on the scales of history.” If Marxism never works out in practice, then, for Marx, the theory would be useless at best and ideological at worst. Furthermore, it seems clear that Marx’s lack of a theory regarding the problems of state bureaucracy has contributed to the failures of actually existing communism. Had he developed a complete theory of state bureaucracy, it is conceivable that Marx might have preferred the evils of capitalism.

The second problem is often referred to as the *missing emancipatory subject*. Critics say that although Marx’s theory places the proletariat at the heart of the social change leading to communism, the proletariat has rarely assumed this leading position and often is among the groups that are most opposed to communism. This problem is compounded by the fact that intellectuals—for example, academic sociologists—have leapt into the gap left by the proletariat and substituted intellectual activity for class struggle. In addition, the intellectuals’ disappointment at the proletariat’s conservatism is transformed into a theory that emphasizes the role of ideology much more strongly than Marx did and that tends to see the “heroes” of the future revolution as manipulated dupes.

The third problem is the *missing dimension of gender*. One of the main points of Marx’s theory is that labor becomes a commodity under capitalism, yet it is a historical fact that the commodifying of labor has happened less to women than to men. To a large degree, men’s paid labor still depends on the *unpaid* labor of women, especially the all-important rearing of the next generation of workers. Sayer (1991) points out that the missing dimension of gender not only leaves a hole in Marx’s analysis but also affects his primary argument that capitalism is defined by its growing dependence on wage labor, because the growth of wage labor has been dependent on the unpaid labor of women. Patriarchy may be an essential foundation for the emergence of capitalism, but Marx simply ignores it.

The fourth problem is that Marx saw the economy as driven almost solely by production, and he ignored the role of consumption. The focus on production led him to predict that concerns for efficiency and cost cutting would lead to proletarianization, increasing alienation, and deepening class conflict. It could be argued, however, that the central role of consumption in the modern economy encourages some creativity and entrepreneurship and that these provide at least some wage labor jobs that are not alienating. People who create new video games or direct movies or perform popular music are less alienated from their work, even though they are firmly entrenched in a capitalist system. Although there are only a few such jobs, their existence gives hope to the alienated masses, who can anticipate that they, or at least their children, might someday work in interesting and creative jobs.

Finally, some might point to Marx’s uncritical acceptance of Western conceptions of progress as a problem. Marx believed that the engine of history is humanity’s always improving exploitation of nature for its material needs. In addition, Marx thought that the essence of human nature is our ability to shape nature to our purposes. It may be that these assumptions are a root cause of many of our current and future ecological crises.

Summary

Marx presents a complex and still relevant analysis of the historical basis of inequality in capitalism and how to change it. Marx's theories are open to many interpretations, but this chapter tries to present an interpretation that makes his theories consistent with his actual historical studies.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the dialectical approach that Marx derived from Hegel and that shapes all of Marx's work. The important point here is that Marx believed that society is structured around contradictions that can be resolved only through actual social change. One of the primary contradictions that Marx looked at was between human potential (nature) and the conditions for labor in capitalism. For Marx, human nature is intimately tied to labor, which both expresses and transforms human potential. Under capitalism, our labor is sold as a commodity, and the commodifying of our labor leads to alienation from our productive activity, from the objects that we make, from our fellow workers, and even from ourselves.

Next the chapter presents Marx's analysis of capitalist society. We begin with the central concept of commodities and then look at the contradiction between their use value and their exchange value. In capitalism, the exchange value of commodities tends to predominate over their actual usefulness in satisfying human needs; therefore, commodities begin to appear to be separate from human labor and from human need and eventually appear to have power over humans. Marx called this the fetishism of commodities. This fetishism is a form of reification, and it affects more than just commodities; in particular, it affects the economic system, which begins to seem like an objective, non-political force that determines our lives. Because of this reification we don't see that the very idea of capital contains a contradictory social relation between those who profit from their investments and those whose actual labor provides the surplus value that constitutes profit. In other words, the ability of capital to generate profit rests on the exploitation of the proletariat. This underlying contradiction leads to class conflict between the proletariat and bourgeoisie, which eventually will result in revolution because proletarianization will swell the ranks of the proletariat. This section concludes by stressing that despite his criticisms of capitalism, Marx believed that capitalism has been good and that his criticisms of it are from the perspective of its potential future.

Marx felt that he was able to take the view from capitalism's potential future because of his materialist conception of history. By focusing on the forces of production, Marx was able to predict historical trends that allowed him to identify where political action could be effective. Political action and even revolution are necessary because relations of production and ideology hold back the necessary development of the forces of production. In Marx's view these changes eventually will lead to a communist society.

We also offer a discussion of some of the most important nonmaterial (cultural) aspects of Marx's theory—especially ideology and religion—as well as some of his famous ideas on economics, especially the labor theory of value.

The chapter ends with some criticisms of Marx's theories. Despite their significance, these criticisms have contributed to the strength of the Marxist approach, even where the strengthening of some Marxist approaches has meant abandoning some of Marx's most strongly held positions.

Emile Durkheim

Chapter Outline

Introduction

Social Facts

The Division of Labor in Society

Suicide

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

Moral Education and Social Reform

Criticisms

Introduction

There are two main themes in the work of Emile Durkheim. The first is the priority of the social over the individual, and the second is the idea that society can be studied scientifically. Because both of these themes continue to be controversial, Durkheim is still relevant today.

We live in a society that tends to see everything as attributable to individuals, even clearly social problems such as racism, pollution, and economic recessions. Durkheim approaches things from the opposite perspective, stressing the social dimension of all human phenomena. However, even some who recognize the importance of society tend to see it as an amorphous entity that can be intuitively understood but never scientifically studied. Here again, Durkheim provides the opposing approach. For Durkheim, society is made up of “social facts” which exceed our intuitive understanding and must be investigated through observations and measurements. These ideas are so central to sociology that Durkheim is often seen as the “father” of sociology (Gouldner, 1958). To found sociology as a discipline was indeed one of Durkheim’s primary goals.

Durkheim (1900/1973b:3) believed that sociology, as an idea, was born in France in the nineteenth century. He wanted to turn this idea into a discipline, a well-defined field of study. He recognized the roots of sociology in the ancient philosophers—such as Plato and Aristotle—and more proximate sources in French philosophers such as Montesquieu and Condorcet. However, in Durkheim’s (1900/1973b:6) view, previous philosophers did not go far enough because they did not try to create an entirely new discipline.

Although the term *sociology* had been coined some years earlier by Auguste Comte, there was no field of sociology per se in late-nineteenth-century universities. There were no schools, departments, or even professors of sociology. There were a few thinkers who were dealing with ideas that were in one way or another sociological, but there was as yet no disciplinary “home” for sociology. Indeed, there was strong opposition from existing disciplines to the founding of such a field. The most significant opposition came from psychology and philosophy, two fields that claimed already to cover the domain sought by sociology. The dilemma for Durkheim, given his aspirations for sociology, was how to create for it a separate and identifiable niche.

To separate it from philosophy, Durkheim argued that sociology should be oriented toward empirical research. This seems simple enough, but the situation was complicated by Durkheim’s belief that sociology was also threatened by a philosophical school within sociology itself. In his view, the two other major figures of the epoch who thought of themselves as sociologists, Comte and Herbert Spencer, were far more interested in philosophizing, in abstract theorizing, than they were in studying the social world empirically. If the field continued in the direction set by Comte and Spencer, Durkheim felt, it would become nothing more than a branch of philosophy. As a result, he found it necessary to attack both Comte and Spencer (Durkheim, 1895/1982:19–20) for relying on preconceived ideas of social phenomena instead of actually studying the real world. Thus Comte was said to be guilty of assuming theoretically that the social world was evolving in the direction of an increasingly perfect society, rather than engaging in the hard, rigorous, and basic work of actually studying the changing nature of various societies. Similarly, Spencer was accused of assuming harmony in society rather than studying whether harmony actually existed.

Social Facts

In order to help sociology move away from philosophy and to give it a clear and separate identity, Durkheim (1895/1982) proposed that the distinctive subject matter of sociology should be the study of social facts (see M. Gane, 1988; Gilbert, 1994; Nielsen, 2005a, 2007a; and the special edition of *Sociological Perspectives* [1995]). Briefly, *social facts* are the social structures and cultural norms and values that are external to, and coercive of, actors. Students, for example, are constrained by such social structures as the university bureaucracy as well as the norms and values of American society, which place great importance on a college education. Similar social facts constrain people in all areas of social life.

Crucial in separating sociology from philosophy is the idea that social facts are to be treated as “things” (S. Jones, 1996) and studied empirically. This means that we must study social facts by acquiring data from outside of our own minds through observation and experimentation. The empirical study of social facts as things sets Durkheimian sociology apart from more philosophical approaches.¹

¹ For a critique of Durkheim’s attempt to separate sociology from philosophy, see Boudon (1995).

A social fact is every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations.

(Durkheim, 1895/1982:13)

Note that Durkheim gave two ways of defining a social fact so that sociology is distinguished from psychology. First, a social fact is experienced as an external constraint rather than an internal drive; second, it is general throughout the society and is not attached to any particular individual.

Durkheim argued that social facts cannot be reduced to individuals, but must be studied as their own reality. Durkheim referred to social facts with the Latin term *sui generis*, which means “unique.” He used this term to claim that social facts have their own unique character that is not reducible to individual consciousness. To allow that social facts could be explained by reference to individuals would be to reduce sociology to psychology. Instead, social facts can be explained only by other social facts. We will study some examples of this type of explanation below, where Durkheim explains the division of labor and even the rate of suicide with other social facts rather than individual intentions. To summarize, social facts can be empirically studied, are external to the individual, are coercive of the individual, and are explained by other social facts.

Durkheim himself gave several examples of social facts, including legal rules, moral obligations, and social conventions. He also refers to language as a social fact, and it provides an easily understood example. First, language is a “thing” that must be studied empirically. One cannot simply philosophize about the logical rules of language. Certainly, all languages have some logical rules regarding grammar, pronunciation, spelling, and so forth; however, all languages also have important exceptions to these logical rules (Quine, 1972). What follows the rules and what are exceptions must be discovered empirically by studying actual language use, especially since language use changes over time in ways that are not completely predictable.

Second, language is external to the individual. Although individuals use a language, language is not defined or created by the individual. The fact that individuals adapt language to their own use indicates that language is first external to the individual and in need of adaptation for individual use. Indeed, some philosophers (Kripke, 1982; Wittgenstein, 1953) have argued that there cannot be such a thing as a private language. A collection of words with only private meanings would not qualify as a language because it could not perform the basic function of a language: communication. Language is, by definition, social and therefore external to any particular individual.

Third, language is coercive of the individual. The language that we use makes some things extremely difficult to say. For example, people in lifelong relationships with same-sex partners have a very difficult time referring to each other. Should they call each other “partners”—leading people into thinking they are in business together—“significant others,” “lovers,” “spouses,” “special friends”? Each seems to have its disadvantages. Language is part of the system of social facts that makes life with a

same-sex partner difficult even if every individual should be personally accepting of same-sex relationships.

Finally, changes in language can be explained only by other social facts and never by one individual's intentions. Even in those rare instances where a change in language can be traced to an individual, the actual explanation for the change is the social facts that have made society open to this change. For example, the most changeable part of language is slang, which almost always originates in a marginal social group. We may assume that an individual first originates a slang term, but which individual is irrelevant. It is the fact of the marginal social group that truly explains the history and function of the slang.

Some sociologists feel that Durkheim took an "extremist" position (Karady, 1983:79–80) in limiting sociology to the study of social facts. This position has limited at least some branches of sociology to the present day. Furthermore, Durkheim seemed to artificially sever sociology from neighboring fields. As Lemert (1994a:91) puts it, "Because he defined sociology so exclusively in relation to its own facts, Durkheim cut it off from the other sciences of man." Nevertheless, whatever its subsequent drawbacks, Durkheim's idea of social facts both established sociology as an independent field of study and provided one of the most convincing arguments for studying society as it is before we decide what it should be.

Material and Nonmaterial Social Facts

Durkheim differentiated between two broad types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. *Material social facts*, such as styles of architecture, forms of technology, and legal codes, are the easier to understand of the two because they are directly observable. Clearly, such things as laws are external to individuals and coercive over them. More importantly, these material social facts often express a far larger and more powerful realm of moral forces that are at least equally external to individuals and coercive over them. These are nonmaterial social facts.

The bulk of Durkheim's studies, and the heart of his sociology, lies in the study of nonmaterial social facts. Durkheim said: "Not all social consciousness achieves . . . externalization and materialization" (1897/1951:315). What sociologists now call norms and values, or more generally culture (Alexander, 1988), are good examples of what Durkheim meant by *nonmaterial social facts*. But this idea creates a problem: How can nonmaterial social facts like norms and values be external to the actor? Where could they be found except in the minds of actors? And if they are in the minds of actors, are they not internal rather than external?

Durkheim recognized that nonmaterial social facts are, to a certain extent, found in the minds of individuals. However, it was his belief that when people begin to interact in complex ways, their interactions will "obey laws all their own" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:471). Individuals are still necessary as a kind of substrate for the nonmaterial social facts, but the particular form and content will be determined by the complex interactions and not by the individuals. Hence, Durkheim could write in the same work first that "Social things are actualized only through men; they are the product of human activity" (1895/1982:17) and second that "Society is not a mere sum of

individuals” (1895/1982:103). Despite the fact that society is made up only of human beings and contains no immaterial “spiritual” substance, it can be understood only through studying the interactions rather than the individuals. The interactions, even when nonmaterial, have their own levels of reality. This has been called “relational realism” (Alpert, 1939).

Durkheim saw social facts along a continuum of materiality (Lukes, 1972:9–10). The sociologist usually begins a study by focusing on material social facts, which are empirically accessible, in order to understand nonmaterial social facts, which are the real focus of his work. The most material are such things as population size and density, channels of communication, and housing arrangements (Andrews, 1993). Durkheim called these facts *morphological*, and they figure most importantly in his first book, *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893/1964). At another level are structural components (a bureaucracy, for example), which are a mixture of morphological components (the density of people in a building and their lines of communication) and nonmaterial social facts (such as the bureaucratic norms).

Types of Nonmaterial Social Facts

Since nonmaterial social facts are so important to Durkheim, we will examine four different types—morality, collective conscience, collective representations, and social currents—before considering how Durkheim used these types in his studies.

Morality

Durkheim was a sociologist of morality in the broadest sense of the word (R. T. Hall, 1987; Mestrovic, 1988; Varga, 2006). Studying him reminds us that a concern with morality was at the foundation of sociology as a discipline. Durkheim’s view of morality had two aspects. First, Durkheim was convinced that morality is a social fact, in other words, that morality can be empirically studied, is external to the individual, is coercive of the individual, and is explained by other social facts. This means that morality is not something that one can philosophize about, but something that one has to study as an empirical phenomenon. This is particularly true because morality is intimately related to the social structure. To understand the morality of any particular institution, you have to *first study* how the institution is constituted, how it came to assume its present form, what its place is in the overall structure of society, how the various institutional obligations are related to the social good, and so forth.

Second, Durkheim was a sociologist of morality because his studies were driven by his concern about the moral “health” of modern society. Much of Durkheim’s sociology can be seen as a by-product of his concern with moral issues. Indeed, one of Durkheim’s associates wrote in a review of his life’s work that “one will fail to understand his works if one does not take account of the fact that morality was their center and object” (Davy, trans. in R. T. Hall, 1987:5).

This second point needs more explanation if we are to understand Durkheim’s perspective. It was not that Durkheim thought that society had become, or was in

danger of becoming, immoral. That was simply impossible because morality was, for Durkheim (1925/1961:59), identified with society. Therefore, society could not be immoral, but it could certainly lose its moral force if the collective interest of society became nothing but the sum of self-interests. Only to the extent that morality was a social fact could it impose an obligation on individuals that superseded their self-interest. Consequently, Durkheim believed that society needs a strong common morality. What the morality should be was of less interest to him.

Durkheim's great concern with morality was related to his curious definition of *freedom*. In Durkheim's view, people were in danger of a "pathological" loosening of moral bonds. These moral bonds were important to Durkheim, for without them the individual would be enslaved by ever-expanding and insatiable passions. People would be impelled by their passions into a mad search for gratification, but each new gratification would lead only to more and more needs. According to Durkheim, the one thing that every human will always want is "more." And, of course, that is the one thing we ultimately cannot have. If society does not limit us, we will become slaves to the pursuit of more. Consequently, Durkheim held the seemingly paradoxical view that the individual needs morality and external control in order to be free. This view of the insatiable desire at the core of every human is central to his sociology.

Collective Conscience

Durkheim attempted to deal with his interest in common morality in various ways and with different concepts. In his early efforts to deal with this issue, Durkheim developed the idea of the *collective conscience*. In French, the word *conscience* means both "consciousness" and "moral conscience." Durkheim characterized the collective conscience in the following way:

The totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average citizens of the same society forms a determinate system which has its own life; one may call it the collective or common conscience. . . . It is, thus, an entirely different thing from particular consciences, although it can be realized only through them.

(Durkheim, 1893/1964:79–80)

Several points are worth underscoring in this definition. First, it is clear that Durkheim thought of the collective conscience as occurring throughout a given society when he wrote of the "totality" of people's beliefs and sentiments. Second, Durkheim clearly conceived of the collective conscience as being independent and capable of determining other social facts. It is not just a reflection of a material base as Marx sometimes suggested. Finally, although he held such views of the collective conscience, Durkheim also wrote of its being "realized" through individual consciousness.

Collective conscience refers to the general structure of shared understandings, norms, and beliefs. It is therefore an all-embracing and amorphous concept. As we will see below, Durkheim employed this concept to argue that "primitive" societies had a stronger collective conscience—that is, more shared understandings, norms, and beliefs—than modern societies.

Collective Representations

Because collective conscience is such a broad and amorphous idea, it is impossible to study directly and must be approached through related material social facts. (For example, we will look at Durkheim's use of the legal system to say something about the collective conscience.) Durkheim's dissatisfaction with this limitation led him to use the collective conscience less in his later work in favor of the much more specific concept of *collective representations* (Nemedi, 1995; Schmaus, 1994). The French word *représentation* literally means "idea." Durkheim used the term to refer to both a collective concept and a social "force." Examples of collective representations are religious symbols, myths, and popular legends. All of these are ways in which society reflects on itself (Durkheim, 1895/1982:40). They represent collective beliefs, norms, and values, and they motivate us to conform to these collective claims.

Collective representations also cannot be reduced to individuals because they emerge out of social interactions, but they can be studied more directly than collective conscience because they are more likely to be connected to material symbols such as flags, icons, and pictures or connected to practices such as rituals. Therefore, the sociologist can begin to study how certain collective representations fit well together, or have an affinity, and others do not. As an example, we can look at a sociological study that shows how representations of Abraham Lincoln have changed in response to other social facts.

Between the turn of the century and 1945, Lincoln, like other heroic presidents, was idealized. Prints showed him holding Theodore Roosevelt's hand and pointing him in the right direction, or hovering in ethereal splendor behind Woodrow Wilson as he contemplated matters of war and peace, or placing his reassuring hand on Franklin Roosevelt's shoulder. Cartoons showed admirers looking up to his statue or portrait. Neoclassical statues depicted him larger than life; state portraits enveloped him in the majesty of presidential power; "grand style" history painting showed him altering the fate of the nation. By the 1960s, however, traditional pictures had disappeared and been replaced by a new kind of representation on billboards, posters, cartoons, and magazine covers. Here Lincoln is shown wearing a party hat and blowing a whistle to mark a bank's anniversary; there he is playing a saxophone to announce a rock concert; elsewhere he is depicted arm in arm with a seductive Marilyn Monroe, or sitting upon his Lincoln Memorial chair of state grasping a can of beer, or wearing sunglasses and looking "cool," or exchanging Valentine cards with George Washington to signify that Valentine's Day had displaced their own traditional birthday celebrations. Post-1960s commemorative iconography articulates the diminishing of Lincoln's dignity.

(B. Schwartz, 1998:73)

Abraham Lincoln functions in American society as a collective representation in that his various representations allow a people to think about themselves as Americans—as either American patriots or American consumers. His image is also a force that motivates us to perform a patriotic duty or to buy a greeting card. A study of this representation allows us to better understand changes in American society.

Social Currents

Most of the examples of social facts that Durkheim refers to are associated with social organizations. However, he made it clear that there are social facts "which do not

present themselves in this already crystallized form” (1895/1982:52). Durkheim called these *social currents*. He gave as examples “the great waves of enthusiasm, indignation, and pity” that are produced in public gatherings (Durkheim, 1895/1982:52–53). Although social currents are less concrete than other social facts, they are nevertheless social facts because they cannot be reduced to the individual. We are swept along by such social currents, and this has a coercive power over us even if we become aware of it only when we struggle against the common feelings.

It is possible for these nonmaterial and ephemeral social facts to affect even the strongest institutions. Ramet (1991), for example, reports that the social currents that are potentially created among a crowd at a rock concert were looked at as a threat by eastern European communist governments and, indeed, contributed to their downfall. Rock concerts were places for the emergence and dissemination of “cultural standards, fashions, and behavioral syndromes independent of party control” (Ramet, 1991:216). In particular, members of the audience were likely to see an expression of their alienation in the concert. Their own feelings were thereby affirmed, strengthened, and given new social and political meanings. In other words, political leaders were afraid of rock concerts because of the potential for the depressing individual *feelings* of alienation to be transformed into the motivating *social fact* of alienation. This provides another example of how social facts are related to but different from individual feelings and intentions.

Given the emphasis on norms, values, and culture in contemporary sociology, we have little difficulty accepting Durkheim’s interest in nonmaterial social facts. However, the concept of social currents does cause us a few problems. Particularly troublesome is the idea of a set of independent social currents “coursing” through the social world as if they were somehow suspended in a social void. This problem has led many to criticize Durkheim for having a group-mind orientation (Pope, 1976:192–194). (Such an idea was prevalent in the late 1800s and early 1900, especially in the work of Franklin H. Giddings [Chriss, 2006].) Those who accuse Durkheim of having such a perspective argue that he accorded nonmaterial social facts an autonomous existence, separate from actors. But cultural phenomena cannot float by themselves in a social void, and Durkheim was well aware of this.

But how are we to conceive of this social consciousness? Is it a simple and transcendent being, soaring above society? . . . It is certain that experience shows us nothing of the sort. The collective mind [*l’esprit collectif*] is only a composite of individual minds. But the latter are not mechanically juxtaposed and closed off from one another. They are in perpetual interaction through the exchange of symbols; they interpenetrate one another. They group themselves according to their natural affinities; they coordinate and systematize themselves. In this way is formed an entirely new psychological being, one without equal in the world. The consciousness with which it is endowed is infinitely more intense and more vast than those which resonate within it. For it is “a consciousness of consciousnesses” [*une conscience de consciences*]. Within it, we find condensed at once all the vitality of the present and of the past.

(Durkheim, 1885/1978:103)

Social currents can be viewed as sets of meanings that are shared by the members of a collectivity. As such, they cannot be explained in terms of the mind of any given

individual. Individuals certainly contribute to social currents, but by becoming social something new develops through their interactions. Social currents can only be explained intersubjectively, that is, in terms of the *interactions* between individuals. They exist at the level of interactions, not at the level of individuals. These collective “moods,” or social currents, vary from one collectivity to another, with the result that there is variation in the rate of certain behaviors, including, as we will see below, something as seemingly individualistic as suicide.

In fact, there are very strong similarities between Durkheim’s theory of social facts and current theories about the relation between the brain and the mind (Sawyer, 2002). Both theories use the idea that complex, constantly changing systems will begin to display new properties that “cannot be predicted from a full and complete description of the component units of the system” (Sawyer, 2002:228). Even though modern philosophy assumes that the mind is nothing but brain functions, the argument is that the complexity of the interconnections in the brain creates a new level of reality, the mind, that is not explainable in terms of individual neurons. This was precisely Durkheim’s argument: that the complexity and intensity of interactions between individuals cause a new level of reality to emerge that cannot be explained in terms of the individuals. Hence, it could be argued that Durkheim had a very modern conception of nonmaterial social facts that encompasses norms, values, culture, and a variety of shared social-psychological phenomena (Emirbayer, 1996).

The Division of Labor in Society

The Division of Labor in Society (Durkheim, 1893/1964; Gibbs, 2003) has been called sociology’s first classic (Tiryakian, 1994). In this work, Durkheim traced the development of the modern relation between individuals and society. In particular, Durkheim wanted to use his new science of sociology to examine what many at the time had come to see as the modern crisis of morality. The preface to the first edition begins, “This book is above all an attempt to treat the facts of moral life according to the methods of the positive sciences.”

In France in Durkheim’s day, there was a widespread feeling of moral crisis. The French Revolution had ushered in a focus on the rights of the individual that often expressed itself as an attack on traditional authority and religious beliefs. This trend continued even after the fall of the revolutionary government. By the mid-nineteenth century, many people felt that social order was threatened because people thought only about themselves and not about society. In the less than 100 years between the French Revolution and Durkheim’s maturity, France went through three monarchies, two empires, and three republics. These regimes produced fourteen constitutions. The feeling of moral crisis was brought to a head by Prussia’s crushing defeat of France in 1870, which included the annexation of Durkheim’s birthplace by Prussia. This was followed by the short-lived and violent revolution known as the Paris Commune.² Both the defeat and the subsequent revolt were blamed on the problem of rampant individualism.

² Before its bloody repression, Marx saw the Paris Commune as the harbinger of the proletariat revolution.

August Comte argued that many of these events could be traced to the increasing division of labor. In simpler societies, people do basically the same thing, such as farming, and they share common experiences and consequently have common values. In modern society, in contrast, everyone has a different job. When different people are assigned various specialized tasks, they no longer share common experiences. This diversity undermines the shared moral beliefs that are necessary for a society. Consequently, people will not sacrifice in times of social need. Comte proposed that sociology create a new pseudo-religion that would reinstate social cohesion. To a large degree, *The Division of Labor in Society* can be seen as a refutation of Comte's analysis (Gouldner, 1962). Durkheim argues that the division of labor does not represent the disappearance of social morality so much as a new kind of social morality.

The thesis of *The Division of Labor* is that modern society is not held together by the similarities between people who do basically similar things. Instead, it is the division of labor itself that pulls people together by forcing them to be dependent on each other. It may seem that the division of labor is an economic necessity that corrodes the feeling of solidarity, but Durkheim (1893/1964:17) argued that “the economic services that it can render are insignificant compared with the moral effect that it produces and its true function is to create between two or more people a feeling of solidarity.”

Mechanical and Organic Solidarity

The change in the division of labor has had enormous implications for the structure of society. Durkheim was most interested in the changed way in which social solidarity is produced, in other words, the changed way in which society is held together and how its members see themselves as part of a whole. To capture this difference, Durkheim referred to two types of solidarity—mechanical and organic. A society characterized by *mechanical* solidarity is unified because all people are generalists. The bond among people is that they are all engaged in similar activities and have similar responsibilities. In contrast, a society characterized by *organic* solidarity is held together by the differences among people, by the fact that all have different tasks and responsibilities.³

Because people in modern society perform a relatively narrow range of tasks, they need many other people in order to survive. The primitive family headed by father-hunter and mother-food gatherer is practically self-sufficient, but the modern family needs the grocer, baker, butcher, auto mechanic, teacher, police officer, and so forth. These people, in turn, need the kinds of services that others provide in order to live in the modern world. Modern society, in Durkheim's view, is thus held together by the specialization of people and their need for the services of many others. This specialization includes not only that of individuals but also of groups, structures, and institutions.

³ For a comparison with Spencer's evolutionary theory, see Perrin (1995).



EMILE DURKHEIM

A Biographical Sketch

Emile Durkheim was born on April 15, 1858, in Epinal, France. He was descended from a long line of rabbis and studied to be a rabbi, but by the time he was in his teens, he had largely disavowed his heritage (Strenski, 1997:4). From that time on, his lifelong interest in

religion was more academic than theological (Mestrovic, 1988). He was dissatisfied not only with his religious training but also with his general education and its emphasis on literary and esthetic matters. He longed for schooling in scientific methods and in the moral principles needed to guide social life. He rejected a traditional academic career in philosophy and sought instead to acquire the scientific training needed to contribute to the moral guidance of society. Although he was interested in scientific sociology, there was no field of sociology at that time, so between 1882 and 1887 he taught philosophy in a number of provincial schools in the Paris area.

His appetite for science was whetted further by a trip to Germany, where he was exposed to the scientific psychology being pioneered by Wilhelm Wundt (Durkheim, 1887/1993). In the years immediately after his visit to Germany, Durkheim published a good deal, basing his work, in part, on his experiences there (R. Jones, 1994). These publications helped him gain a position in the department of philosophy at the University of Bordeaux in 1887 (Pearce, 2005). There Durkheim offered the first course in social science in a French university. This was a particularly impressive accomplishment, because only a decade earlier, a furor had erupted in a French university after the mention of Auguste Comte in a student dissertation. Durkheim's main responsibility, however, was teaching courses in education to schoolteachers, and his most important course was in the area of moral education. His goal was to communicate a moral system to the educators, who he hoped would then pass the system on to young people in an effort to help reverse the moral degeneration he saw around him in French society.

The years that followed were characterized by a series of personal successes for Durkheim. In 1893 he published his French doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labor in Society*, as well as his Latin thesis on Montesquieu (Durkheim, 1892/1997; W. Miller, 1993). His major methodological statement, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, appeared in 1895, followed (in 1897) by his empirical application of those methods in the study *Suicide*. By 1896 he had become a full professor at Bordeaux. In 1902 he was summoned to the famous French university the Sorbonne, and in 1906 he was named professor of the science of education, a title that was changed in 1913 to professor of the science of education and sociology. The other of his most famous works, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, was published in 1912.

Durkheim is most often thought of today as a political conservative, and his influence within sociology certainly has been a conservative one. But in his time, he was considered a liberal, and this was exemplified by the active public role he played in the defense of Alfred Dreyfus, the Jewish army captain whose court-martial for treason was felt by many to be anti-Semitic (Farrell, 1997).

Durkheim was deeply offended by the Dreyfus affair, particularly its anti-Semitism (Goldberg, 2008). But Durkheim did not attribute this anti-Semitism to racism among the French people. Characteristically, he saw it as a symptom of the moral sickness confronting French society as a whole (Birnbaum and Todd, 1995). He said:

When society undergoes suffering, it feels the need to find someone whom it can hold responsible for its sickness, on whom it can avenge its misfortunes: and those against whom public opinion already discriminates are naturally designated for this role. These are the pariahs who serve as expiatory victims. What confirms me in this interpretation is the way in which the result of Dreyfus's trial was greeted in 1894. There was a surge of joy in the boulevards. People celebrated as a triumph what should have been a cause for public mourning. At least they knew whom to blame for the economic troubles and moral distress in which they lived. The trouble came from the Jews. The charge had been officially proved. By this very fact alone, things already seemed to be getting better and people felt consoled.

(Lukes, 1972:345)

Thus, Durkheim's interest in the Dreyfus affair stemmed from his deep and lifelong interest in morality and the moral crisis confronting modern society.

To Durkheim, the answer to the Dreyfus affair and crises like it lay in ending the moral disorder in society. Because that could not be done quickly or easily, Durkheim suggested more specific actions such as severe repression of those who incite hatred of others and government efforts to show the public how it is being misled. He urged people to "have the courage to proclaim aloud what they think, and to unite together in order to achieve victory in the struggle against public madness" (Lukes, 1972:347).

Durkheim's (1928/1962) interest in socialism is also taken as evidence against the idea that he was a conservative, but his kind of socialism was very different from the kind that interested Marx and his followers. In fact, Durkheim labeled Marxism as a set of "disputable and out-of-date hypotheses" (Lukes, 1972:323). To Durkheim, socialism represented a movement aimed at the moral regeneration of society through scientific morality, and he was not interested in short-term political methods or the economic aspects of socialism. He did not see the proletariat as the salvation of society, and he was greatly opposed to agitation or violence. Socialism for Durkheim was very different from what we usually think of as socialism; it simply represented a system in which the moral principles discovered by scientific sociology were to be applied.

Durkheim, as we will see throughout this book, had a profound influence on the development of sociology, but his influence was not restricted to it (Halls, 1996). Much of his impact on other fields came through the journal *L'année sociologique*, which he founded in 1898. An intellectual circle arose around the journal with Durkheim at its center. Through it, he and his ideas influenced such fields as anthropology, history (especially the "Annales school" [Nielsen, 2005b]), linguistics, and—somewhat ironically, considering his early attacks on the field—psychology.

Durkheim died on November 15, 1917, a celebrated figure in French intellectual circles, but it was not until over twenty years later, with the publication of Talcott Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), that his work became a significant influence on American sociology.

TABLE 3.1**The Four Dimensions of the Collective Conscience**

Solidarity	Volume	Intensity	Rigidity	Content
Mechanical	Entire society	High	High	Religious
Organic	Particular groups	Low	Low	Moral individualism

Durkheim argued that primitive societies have a stronger collective conscience, that is, more shared understandings, norms, and beliefs. The increasing division of labor has caused a diminution of the collective conscience. The collective conscience is of much less significance in a society with organic solidarity than it is in a society with mechanical solidarity. People in modern society are more likely to be held together by the division of labor and the resulting need for the functions performed by others than they are by a shared and powerful collective conscience. Nevertheless, even organic societies have a collective consciousness, albeit in a weaker form that allows for more individual differences.

Anthony Giddens (1972) points out that the collective conscience in the two types of society can be differentiated on four dimensions—volume, intensity, rigidity, and content (see Table 3.1). *Volume* refers to the number of people enveloped by the collective conscience; *intensity*, to how deeply the individuals feel about it; *rigidity*, to how clearly it is defined; and *content*, to the form that the collective conscience takes in the two types of society. In a society characterized by mechanical solidarity, the collective conscience covers virtually the entire society and all its members; it is believed in with great intensity; it is extremely rigid; and its content is highly religious in character. In a society with organic solidarity, the collective conscience is limited to particular groups; it is adhered to with much less intensity; it is not very rigid; and its content is the elevation of the importance of the individual to a moral precept.

Dynamic Density

The division of labor was a material social fact to Durkheim because it is a pattern of interactions in the social world. As indicated above, social facts must be explained by other social facts. Durkheim believed that the cause of the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity was dynamic density. This concept refers to the number of people in a society and the amount of interaction that occurs among them. More people means an increase in the competition for scarce resources, and more interaction means a more intense struggle for survival among the basically similar components of society.

The problems associated with dynamic density usually are resolved through differentiation and, ultimately, the emergence of new forms of social organization. The rise of the division of labor allows people to complement, rather than conflict with, one another. Furthermore, the increased division of labor makes for greater efficiency, with the result that resources increase, making the competition over them more peaceful.

This points to one final difference between mechanical and organic solidarity. In societies with organic solidarity, less competition and more differentiation allow people to cooperate more and to all be supported by the same resource base. Therefore, difference allows for even closer bonds between people than does similarity. Thus, in a society characterized by organic solidarity, there are both more solidarity and more individuality than there are in a society characterized by mechanical solidarity (Rueschemeyer, 1994). Individuality, then, is not the opposite of close social bonds but a requirement for them (Muller, 1994).

Repressive and Restitutive Law

The division of labor and dynamic density are material social facts, but Durkheim's main interest was in the forms of solidarity, which are nonmaterial social facts. Durkheim felt that it was difficult to study nonmaterial social facts directly, especially something as pervasive as a collective conscience. In order to study nonmaterial social facts scientifically, the sociologist should examine material social facts that reflect the nature of, and changes in, nonmaterial social facts. In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim chose to study the differences between law in societies with mechanical solidarity and law in societies with organic solidarity (Cotterrell, 1999).

Durkheim argued that a society with mechanical solidarity is characterized by *repressive law*. Because people are very similar in this type of society, and because they tend to believe very strongly in a common morality, any offense against their shared value system is likely to be of significance to most individuals. Since everyone feels the offense and believes deeply in the common morality, a wrongdoer is likely to be punished severely for any action that offends the collective moral system. Theft might lead to the cutting off of the offender's hands; blaspheming might result in the removal of one's tongue. Even minor offenses against the moral system are likely to be met with severe punishment.

In contrast, a society with organic solidarity is characterized by *restitutive law*, which requires offenders to make restitution for their crimes. In such societies, offenses are more likely to be seen as committed against a particular individual or segment of society than against the moral system itself. Because there is a weak common morality, most people do not react emotionally to a breach of the law. Instead of being severely punished for every offense against the collective morality, offenders in an organic society are likely to be asked to make restitution to those who have been harmed by their actions. Although some repressive law continues to exist in a society with organic solidarity (for example, the death penalty), restitutive law predominates, especially for minor offenses.

In summary, Durkheim argues in *The Division of Labor* that the form of moral solidarity has changed in modern society, not disappeared. We have a new form of solidarity that allows for more interdependence and closer, less competitive relations and that produces a new form of law based on restitution. However, this book was far from a celebration of modern society. Durkheim argued that this new form of solidarity is prone to certain kinds of social pathologies.

Normal and Pathological

Perhaps the most controversial of Durkheim's claims was that the sociologist is able to distinguish between healthy and pathological societies. After using this idea in *The Division of Labor*, Durkheim wrote another book, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1982), in which, among other things, he attempted to refine and defend this idea. He claimed that a healthy society can be recognized because the sociologist will find similar conditions in other societies in similar stages. If a society departs from what is normally found, it is probably pathological.

This idea was attacked at the time, and there are few sociologists today who subscribe to it. Even Durkheim, when he wrote the "Preface to the Second Edition" of *The Rules*, no longer attempted to defend it: "It seems pointless for us to revert to the other controversies that this book has given rise to, for they do not touch upon anything essential. The general orientation of the method does not depend upon the procedures preferred to classify social types or distinguish the normal from the pathological" (1895/1982:45).

Nevertheless, there is one interesting idea that Durkheim derived from this argument: the idea that crime is normal (Smith, 2008) rather than pathological. He argued that since crime is found in every society, it must be normal and provide a useful function. Crime, he claimed, helps societies define and delineate their collective conscience: "Imagine a community of saints in an exemplary and perfect monastery. In it crime as such will be unknown, but faults that appear venial to the ordinary person will arouse the same scandal as does normal crime in ordinary consciences. If therefore that community has the power to judge and punish, it will term such acts criminal and deal with them as such" (1895/1982:100).

In *The Division of Labor*, he used the idea of pathology to criticize some of the "abnormal" forms the division of labor takes in modern society. He identified three abnormal forms: (1) the anomic division of labor, (2) the forced division of labor, and (3) the poorly coordinated division of labor. Durkheim maintained that the moral crises of modernity that Comte and others had identified with the division of labor were really caused by these abnormal forms.

The *anomic division of labor* refers to the lack of regulation in a society that celebrates isolated individuality and refrains from telling people what they should do. Durkheim further develops this concept of *anomie* in his work on suicide, discussed later. In both works, he uses the term to refer to social conditions in which humans lack sufficient moral restraint (Bar-Haim, 1997; Hilbert, 1986). For Durkheim, modern society is always prone to *anomie*, but it comes to the fore in times of social and economic crises.

Without the strong common morality of mechanical solidarity, people might not have a clear concept of what is and what is not proper and acceptable behavior. Even though the division of labor is a source of cohesion in modern society, it cannot entirely make up for the weakening of the common morality. Individuals can become isolated and be cut adrift in their highly specialized activities. They can more easily cease to feel a common bond with those who work and live around them. This gives rise to *anomie*. Organic solidarity is prone to this particular "pathology," but it is

important to remember that Durkheim saw this as an abnormal situation. The modern division of labor has the capacity to promote increased moral interactions rather than reducing people to isolated and meaningless tasks and positions.

While Durkheim believed that people needed rules and regulation to tell them what to do, his second abnormal form pointed to a kind of rule that could lead to conflict and isolation and therefore increase anomie. He called this the *forced division of labor*. This second pathology refers to the fact that outdated norms and expectations can force individuals, groups, and classes into positions for which they are ill suited. Traditions, economic power, or status can determine who performs what jobs regardless of talent and qualification. It is here that Durkheim comes closest to a Marxist position:

If one class in society is obliged, in order to live, to take any price for its services, while another class can pass over this situation, because of the resources already at its disposal, resources that, however, are not necessarily the result of some social superiority, the latter group has an unjust advantage over the former with respect to the law.

(Durkheim, 1895/1982:319)

Finally, the third form of abnormal division of labor is evident when the specialized functions performed by different people are *poorly coordinated*. Again Durkheim makes the point that organic solidarity flows from the interdependence of people. If people's specializations do not result in increased interdependence but simply in isolation, the division of labor will not result in social solidarity.

Justice

For the division of labor to function as a moral and socially solidifying force in modern society, anomie, the forced division of labor, and the improper coordination of specialization must be addressed. Modern societies are no longer held together by shared experiences and common beliefs. Instead, they are held together through their very differences, so long as those differences are allowed to develop in a way that promotes interdependence. Key to this for Durkheim is social justice:

The task of the most advanced societies is, then, a work of justice. . . . Just as the idea of lower societies was to create or maintain as intense a common life as possible, in which the individual was absorbed, so our ideal is to make social relations always more equitable, so as to assure the free development of all our socially useful forces.

(Durkheim, 1893/1964:387)

Morality, social solidarity, justice—these were big themes for a first book in a fledgling field. Durkheim was to return to these ideas again in his work, but never again would he look at them in terms of society as a whole. He predicted in his second book, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895/1982:184), that sociology itself would succumb to the division of labor and break down into a collection of specialties. Whether this has led to an increased interdependence and an organic solidarity in sociology is still an open question.

Suicide

It has been suggested that Durkheim's study of suicide is the paradigmatic example of how a sociologist should connect theory and research (Merton, 1968). Indeed, Durkheim makes it clear in the "Preface" that he intended this study not only to contribute to the understanding of a particular social problem, but also to serve as an example of his new sociological method. (For a series of appraisals of *Suicide* nearly 100 years after its publication, see Lester, 1994.)

Durkheim chose to study suicide because it is a relatively concrete and specific phenomenon for which there were comparatively good data available. However, Durkheim's most important reason for studying suicide was to prove the power of the new science of sociology. Suicide is generally considered to be one of the most private and personal acts. Durkheim believed that if he could show that sociology had a role to play in explaining such a seemingly individualistic act as suicide, it would be relatively easy to extend sociology's domain to phenomena that are much more readily seen as open to sociological analysis.

As a sociologist, Durkheim was not concerned with studying why any specific individual committed suicide (for a critique of this, see Berk, 2006). That was to be left to the psychologists. Instead, Durkheim was interested in explaining differences in *suicide rates*; that is, he was interested in why one group had a higher rate of suicide than did another. Psychological or biological factors may explain why a particular individual in a group commits suicide, but Durkheim assumed that only social facts could explain why one group had a higher rate of suicide than did another. (For a critique of this approach and an argument for the need to include cultural and psychological factors in the study of suicide, see Hamlin and Brym, 2006.)

Durkheim proposed two related ways of evaluating suicide rates. One way is to compare different societies or other types of collectivities. Another way is to look at the changes in the suicide rate in the same collectivity over time. In either case, cross-culturally or historically, the logic of the argument is essentially the same. If there is variation in suicide rates from one group to another or from one time period to another, Durkheim believed that the difference would be the consequence of variations in sociological factors, in particular, social currents. Durkheim acknowledged that individuals may have reasons for committing suicide, but these reasons are not the real cause: "They may be said to indicate the individual's weak points, where the outside current bearing the impulse to self-destruction most easily finds introduction. But they are no part of this current itself, and consequently cannot help us to understand it" (1897/1951:151).

Durkheim began *Suicide* by testing and rejecting a series of alternative ideas about the causes of suicide. Among these are individual psychopathology, alcoholism, race, heredity, and climate. Not all of Durkheim's arguments are convincing (see, for example, Skog, 1991, for an examination of Durkheim's argument against alcoholism). However, what is important is his method of empirically dismissing what he considered extraneous factors so that he could get to what he thought of as the most important causal variables.

In addition, Durkheim examined and rejected the imitation theory associated with one of his contemporaries, the French social psychologist Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904). The theory of imitation argues that people commit suicide (and engage in a wide range of other actions) because they are imitating the actions of others. This social-psychological approach was the most important competitor to Durkheim’s focus on social facts. As a result, Durkheim took great pains to discredit it. For example, Durkheim reasoned that if imitation were truly important, we should find that nations that border on a country with a high suicide rate would themselves have high rates, but an examination of the data showed that no such relationship existed. Durkheim admitted that some individual suicides may be the result of imitation, but it is such a minor factor that it has no significant effect on the overall suicide rate.

Durkheim concluded that the critical factors in differences in suicide rates were to be found in differences at the level of social facts. Different groups have different collective sentiments,⁴ which produce different social currents. It is these social currents that affect individual decisions about suicide. In other words, changes in the collective sentiments lead to changes in social currents, which, in turn, lead to changes in suicide rates.

The Four Types of Suicide

Durkheim’s theory of suicide can be seen more clearly if we examine the relation between the types of suicide and his two underlying social facts—integration and regulation (Pope, 1976). Integration refers to the strength of the attachment that we have to society. Regulation refers to the degree of external constraint on people. For Durkheim, the two social currents are continuous variables, and suicide rates go up when either of these currents is too low or too high. We therefore have four types of suicide (see Table 3.2). If integration is high, Durkheim calls that type of suicide altruistic. Low integration results in an increase in egoistic suicides. Fatalistic suicide is associated with high regulation, and anomic suicide with low regulation.

Egoistic Suicide

High rates of *egoistic suicide* (Berk, 2006) are likely to be found in societies or groups in which the individual is not well integrated into the larger social unit. This lack of integration leads to a feeling that the individual is not part of society, but this also means that society is not part of the individual. Durkheim believed that the best parts of a human being—our morality, values, and sense of purpose—come from society. An integrated society provides us with these things, as well as a general feeling of moral support to get us through the daily small indignities and trivial disappointments. Without this, we are liable to commit suicide at the smallest frustration.

⁴ Durkheim is moving away from using the term *collective conscience* in this work, but he has not fully developed the idea of collective representations. I see no substantial difference between his use of *collective sentiments* in *Suicide* and his use of *collective conscience* in *The Division of Labor*.

TABLE 3.2**The Four Types of Suicide**

Integration	Low	Egoistic suicide
	High	Altruistic suicide
Regulation	Low	Anomic suicide
	High	Fatalistic suicide

The lack of social integration produces distinctive social currents, and these currents cause differences in suicide rates. For example, Durkheim talked of societal disintegration leading to “currents of depression and disillusionment” (1897/1951:214). Politics is dominated by a sense of futility, morality is seen as an individual choice, and popular philosophies stress the meaninglessness of life. In contrast, strongly integrated groups discourage suicide. The protective, enveloping social currents produced by integrated societies prevent the widespread occurrence of egoistic suicide by, among other things, providing people with a sense of the broader meaning of their lives. Here is the way Durkheim puts it regarding religious groups:

Religion protects man against the desire for self-destruction. . . . What constitutes religion is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, also the greater its preservative value.

(Durkheim, 1897/1951:170)

However, Durkheim demonstrated that not all religions provide the same degree of protection from suicide. Protestant religions with their emphasis on individual faith over church community and their lack of communal rituals tend to provide less protection. His principal point is that it is not the particular beliefs of the religion that are important, but the degree of integration.

Durkheim’s statistics also showed that suicide rates go up for those who are unmarried and therefore less integrated into a family, whereas the rates go down in times of national political crises such as wars and revolutions, when social causes and revolutionary or nationalist fervor give people’s lives greater meaning. He argues that the only thing that all of these have in common is the increased feeling of integration.

Interestingly, Durkheim affirms the importance of social forces even in the case of egoistic suicide, where the individual might be thought to be free of social constraints. Actors are never free of the force of the collectivity: “However individualized a man may be, there is always something collective remaining—the very depression and melancholy resulting from this same exaggerated individualism. He effects communion through sadness when he no longer has anything else with which to achieve it” (Durkheim, 1897/1951:214). The case of egoistic suicide indicates that in even the most individualistic, most private of acts, social facts are the key determinant.

Altruistic Suicide

The second type of suicide discussed by Durkheim is altruistic suicide. Whereas egoistic suicide is more likely to occur when social integration is too weak, *altruistic suicide* is more likely to occur when “social integration is too strong” (Durkheim, 1897/1951:217). The individual is literally forced into committing suicide.

One notorious example of altruistic suicide was the mass suicide of the followers of the Reverend Jim Jones in Jonestown, Guyana, in 1978. They knowingly took a poisoned drink and in some cases had their children drink it as well. They clearly were committing suicide because they were so tightly integrated into the society of Jones’s fanatical followers. Durkheim notes that this is also the explanation for those who seek to be martyrs (Durkheim, 1897/1951:225), as in the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001. More generally, those who commit altruistic suicide do so because they feel that it is their duty to do so. Durkheim argued that this is particularly likely in the military, where the degree of integration is so strong that an individual will feel that he or she has disgraced the entire group by the most trivial of failures.

Whereas higher rates of egoistic suicide stem from “incurable weariness and sad depression,” the increased likelihood of altruistic suicide “springs from hope, for it depends on the belief in beautiful perspectives beyond this life” (Durkheim, 1897/1951:225). When integration is low, people will commit suicide because they have no greater good to sustain them. When integration is high, they commit suicide in the name of that greater good.

Anomic Suicide

The third major form of suicide discussed by Durkheim is *anomic suicide*, which is more likely to occur when the regulative powers of society are disrupted. Such disruptions are likely to leave individuals dissatisfied because there is little control over their passions, which are free to run wild in an insatiable race for gratification. Rates of anomic suicide are likely to rise whether the nature of the disruption is positive (for example, an economic boom) or negative (an economic depression). Either type of disruption renders the collectivity temporarily incapable of exercising its authority over individuals. Such changes put people in new situations in which the old norms no longer apply but new ones have yet to develop. Periods of disruption unleash currents of anomie—moods of rootlessness and normlessness—and these currents lead to an increase in rates of anomic suicide. This is relatively easy to envisage in the case of an economic depression. The closing of a factory because of a depression may lead to the loss of a job, with the result that the individual is cut adrift from the regulative effect that both the company and the job may have had. Being cut off from these structures or others (for example, family, religion, and state) can leave an individual highly vulnerable to the effects of currents of anomie.

Somewhat more difficult to imagine is the effect of an economic boom. In this case, Durkheim argued that sudden success leads individuals away from the traditional structures in which they are embedded. It may lead individuals to quit their jobs, move to a new community, perhaps even find a new spouse. All these changes disrupt the regulative effect of extant structures and leave the individual in

boom periods vulnerable to anomic social currents. In such a condition, people's activity is released from regulation, and even their dreams are no longer restrained. People in an economic boom seem to have limitless prospects, and "reality seems valueless by comparison with the dreams of fevered imaginations" (Durkheim, 1897/1951:256).

The increases in rates of anomic suicide during periods of deregulation of social life are consistent with Durkheim's views on the pernicious effect of individual passions when freed of external constraint. People thus freed will become slaves to their passions and as a result, in Durkheim's view, commit a wide range of destructive acts, including killing themselves.

Fatalistic Suicide

There is a little-mentioned fourth type of suicide—fatalistic—that Durkheim discussed only in a footnote in *Suicide* (Acevedo, 2005; Besnard, 1993). Whereas anomic suicide is more likely to occur in situations in which regulation is too weak, *fatalistic suicide* is more likely to occur when regulation is excessive. Durkheim (1897/1951:276) described those who are more likely to commit fatalistic suicide as "persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline." The classic example is the slave who takes his own life because of the hopelessness associated with the oppressive regulation of his every action. Too much regulation—oppression—unleashes currents of melancholy that, in turn, cause a rise in the rate of fatalistic suicide.

Durkheim argued that social currents cause changes in the rates of suicides. Individual suicides are affected by these underlying currents of egoism, altruism, anomie, and fatalism. This proved, for Durkheim, that these currents are more than just the sum of individuals, but are *sui generis* forces, because they dominate the decisions of individuals. Without this assumption, the stability of the suicide rate for any particular society could not be explained.

Suicide Rates and Social Reform

Durkheim concludes his study of suicide with an examination of what reforms could be undertaken to prevent it. Most attempts to prevent suicide have failed because it has been seen as an individual problem. For Durkheim, attempts to directly convince individuals not to commit suicide are futile, since its real causes are in society.

Of course, the first question to be asked is whether suicide should be prevented or whether it counts among those social phenomena that Durkheim would call normal because of its widespread prevalence. This is an especially important question for Durkheim because his theory says that suicides result from social currents that, in a less exaggerated form, are good for society. We would not want to stop all economic booms because they lead to anomic suicides, nor would we stop valuing individuality because it leads to egoistic suicide. Similarly, altruistic suicide results from our virtuous tendency to sacrifice ourselves for the community. The pursuit of progress, the belief in the individual, and the spirit of sacrifice all have their place in society, and cannot exist without generating some suicides.

Durkheim admits that some suicide is normal, but he argues that modern society has seen a pathological increase in both egoistic and anomic suicides. Here his position can be traced back to *The Division of Labor*, where he argued that the anomie of modern culture is due to the abnormal way in which labor is divided so that it leads to isolation rather than interdependence. What is needed, then, is a way to preserve the benefits of modernity without unduly increasing suicides—a way of balancing these social currents. In our society, Durkheim believes, these currents are out of balance. In particular, social regulation and integration are too low, leading to an abnormal rate of anomic and egoistic suicides.

Many of the existing institutions for connecting the individual and society have failed, and Durkheim sees little hope of their success. The modern state is too distant from the individual to influence his or her life with enough force and continuity. The church cannot exert its integrating effect without at the same time repressing freedom of thought. Even the family, possibly the most integrative institution in modern society, will fail in this task because it is subject to the same corrosive conditions that are increasing suicide.

Instead, what Durkheim suggests is the need of a different institution based on occupational groups. We will discuss these occupational associations more below, but what is important here is that Durkheim proposes a social solution to a social problem.

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

Early and Late Durkheimian Theory

Before we go on to Durkheim's last great sociological work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912/1965), we should say some things about the way in which his ideas were received into American sociology. As we said, Durkheim is seen as the "father" of modern sociology, but, unlike biological paternity, the parentage of disciplines is not susceptible to DNA tests and therefore must be seen as a social construction. To a large degree, Durkheim was awarded his status of "father" by one of America's greatest theorists, Talcott Parsons (1937), and this has influenced subsequent views of Durkheim.

Parsons presented Durkheim as undergoing a theoretical change between *Suicide* and *The Elementary Forms*. He believed that the early Durkheim was primarily a positivist who tried to apply the methods of the natural sciences to the study of society, while the later Durkheim was an idealist who traced social changes to changes in collective ideas. Even though Parsons (1975) later admitted that this division was "overdone," it has made its way into many sociologists' understanding of Durkheim. For the most part, sociologists tend to find an early or a late Durkheim they agree with and emphasize that aspect of his work.

There is some truth to this periodization of Durkheim, but it seems to be more a matter of his focus than any great theoretical shift. Durkheim always believed that social forces were akin to natural forces and always believed that collective ideas shaped social practices as well as vice versa. However, there is no doubt that

after *Suicide*, the question of religion became of overriding importance in Durkheim's sociological theory. It would be wrong to see this as a form of idealism. In fact, we see in the text that Durkheim was actually worried that he would be seen as too materialistic since he assumed that religious beliefs are dependent upon such concrete social practices as rituals.

In addition, Durkheim, in his later period, more directly addressed how individuals internalize social structures. Durkheim's often overly zealous arguments for sociology and against psychology have led many to argue that he had little to offer on how social facts affected the consciousnesses of human actors (Lukes, 1972:228). This was particularly true in his early work, where he dealt with the link between social facts and individual consciousness in only a vague and cursory way. Nevertheless, Durkheim's ultimate goal was to explain how individual humans are shaped by social facts. We see his clear announcement of that intent in regard to *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*: "In general, we hold that sociology has not completely achieved its task so long as it has not penetrated into the mind . . . of the individual in order to relate the institutions it seeks to explain to their psychological conditions. . . . Man is for us less a point of departure than a point of arrival" (Durkheim, cited in Lukes, 1972:498–499). As we will see in what follows, he proposed a theory of ritual and effervescence that addressed the link between social facts and human consciousness, as did his work on moral education.

Theory of Religion—The Sacred and the Profane

Raymond Aron (1965:45) said of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* that it was Durkheim's most important, most profound, and most original work. Randall Collins and Michael Makowsky (1998:107) call it "perhaps the greatest single book of the twentieth century." In this book, Durkheim put forward both a sociology of religion and a theory of knowledge. His sociology of religion consisted of an attempt to identify the enduring essence of religion through an analysis of its most primitive forms. His theory of knowledge attempted to connect the fundamental categories of human thought to their social origins. It was Durkheim's great genius to propose a sociological connection between these two disparate puzzles. Put briefly, he found the enduring essence of religion in the setting apart of the *sacred* from all that is profane (Edwards, 2007). This sacred is created through rituals that transform the moral power of society into religious symbols that bind individuals to the group. Durkheim's most daring argument is that this moral bond becomes a cognitive bond because the categories for understanding, such as classification, time, space, and causation, are also derived from religious rituals.

Let us start with Durkheim's theory of religion. Society (through individuals) creates religion by defining certain phenomena as sacred and others as profane. Those aspects of social reality that are defined as *sacred*—that is, that are set apart from the everyday—form the essence of religion. The rest are defined as *profane*—the commonplace, the utilitarian, the mundane aspects of life. On the one hand, the sacred brings out an attitude of reverence, awe, and obligation. On the other hand, it is the attitude accorded to these phenomena that transforms them from profane to sacred. The question for Durkheim was, What is the source of this reverence, awe, and obligation?

Here he proposed to both retain the essential truth of religion while revealing its sociological reality.⁵ Durkheim refused to believe that all religion is nothing but an illusion. Such a pervasive social phenomenon must have some truth. However, that truth need not be precisely that which is believed by the participants. Indeed, as a strict agnostic, Durkheim could not believe that anything supernatural was the source of these religious feelings. There really is a superior moral power that inspires believers, but it is society and not God. Durkheim argued that religion symbolically embodies society itself. Religion is the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself. This was the only way that he could explain why every society has had religious beliefs but each has had different beliefs.

Society is a power that is greater than we are. It transcends us, demands our sacrifices, suppresses our selfish tendencies, and fills us with energy. Society, according to Durkheim, exercises these powers through representations. In God, he sees “only society transfigured and symbolically expressed” (Durkheim, 1906/1974:52). Thus society is the source of the sacred.

Beliefs, Rituals, and Church

The differentiation between the sacred and the profane and the elevation of some aspects of social life to the sacred level are necessary but not sufficient conditions for the development of religion. Three other conditions are needed. First, there must be the development of a set of religious beliefs. These *beliefs* are “the representations which express the nature of sacred things and the relations which they sustain, either with each other or with profane things” (Durkheim, 1912/1965:56). Second, a set of religious *rituals* is necessary. These are “the rules of conduct which prescribe how a man should comport himself in the presence of these sacred objects” (Durkheim, 1912/1965:56). Finally, a religion requires a *church*, or a single overarching moral community. The interrelationships among the sacred, beliefs, rituals, and church led Durkheim to the following definition of a religion: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (1912/1965:62).

Rituals and the church are important to Durkheim’s theory of religion because they connect the representations of the social to individual practices. Durkheim often assumes that social currents are simply absorbed by individuals through some sort of contagion, but here he spells out how such a process might work. Individuals learn about the sacred and its associated beliefs through participating in rituals and in the community of the church. As we will see below, this is also how individuals learn the categories of understanding (Rawls, 1996). Furthermore, rituals and the church keep social representations from dissipating and losing their force by dramatically reenacting the collective memory of the group. Finally, they reconnect individuals to the social, a source of greater energy that inspires them when they return to their mundane pursuits.

⁵ Other sociologies of religion, for example, by Marx, Weber, and Simmel, saw religions as false explanations of natural phenomena (B. Turner, 1991).

Why Primitive?

Although the research reported in *The Elementary Forms* was not Durkheim's own, he felt it necessary, given his commitment to empirical science, to embed his thinking on religion in published data. The major sources of his data were studies of a clan-based Australian tribe, the Arunta, who, for Durkheim, represented primitive culture. Although today we are very skeptical of the idea that some cultures are more primitive than others, Durkheim wanted to study religion within a "primitive" culture for several reasons. First, he believed that it is much easier to gain insight into the essential nature of religion in a primitive culture because the ideological systems of primitive religions are less well developed than are those of modern religions, with the result that there is less obfuscation. Religious forms in primitive society could be "shown in all their nudity," and it would require "only the slightest effort to lay them open" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:18). In addition, whereas religion in modern society takes diverse forms, in primitive society there is "intellectual and moral conformity" (Durkheim, 1912/1965:18). This makes it easier to relate the common beliefs to the common social structures.

Durkheim studied primitive religion only in order to shed light on religion in modern society. Religion in a nonmodern society is an all-encompassing collective conscience. But as society grows more specialized, religion comes to occupy an increasingly narrow domain. It becomes simply one of a number of collective representations. Although it expresses some collective sentiments, other institutions (for example, law and science) come to express other aspects of the collective morality. Durkheim recognized that religion per se comes to occupy an ever narrower domain, but he also contended that most, if not all, of the various collective representations of modern society have their origin in the all-encompassing religion of primitive society.

Totemism

Because Durkheim believed that society is the source of religion, he was particularly interested in totemism among the Australian Arunta. *Totemism* is a religious system in which certain things, particularly animals and plants, come to be regarded as sacred and as emblems of the clan. Durkheim viewed totemism as the simplest, most primitive form of religion, and he believed it to be associated with a similarly simple form of social organization, the clan.

Durkheim argued that the totem is nothing but the representation of the clan itself. Individuals who experience the heightened energy of social force in a gathering of the clan seek some explanation for this state. Durkheim believed that the gathering itself was the real cause, but even today, people are reluctant to attribute this power to social forces. Instead, the clan member mistakenly attributes the energy he or she feels to the symbols of the clan. The totems are the material representations of the nonmaterial force that is at their base, and that nonmaterial force is none other than society. Totemism, and more generally religion, are derived from the collective morality and become impersonal forces. They are not simply a series of mythical animals, plants, personalities, spirits, or gods.

As a study of primitive religion, the specifics of Durkheim's interpretation have been questioned (Hiatt, 1996). However, even if totemism is not the most primitive religion, it was certainly the best vehicle to develop Durkheim's new theory linking together religion, knowledge, and society.

Although a society may have a large number of totems, Durkheim did not view these totems as representing a series of separate, fragmentary beliefs about specific animals or plants. Instead, he saw them as an interrelated set of ideas that give the society a more or less complete representation of the world. In totemism, three classes of things are connected: the totemic symbol, the animal or plant, and the members of the clan. As such, totemism provides a way to classify natural objects that reflects the social organization of the tribe. Hence, Durkheim was able to argue that the ability to classify nature into cognitive categories is derived from religious and ultimately social experiences. Later, society may develop better ways to classify nature and its symbols, for example, into scientific genera and species, but the basic idea of classification comes from social experiences. He expanded on this idea that the social world grounds our mental categories in his earlier essay with his nephew Marcel Mauss:

Society was not simply a model which classificatory thought followed; it was its own divisions which served as divisions for the system of classification. The first logical categories were social categories; the first classes of things were classes of men. . . . It was because men were grouped, and thought of themselves in the form of groups, that in their ideas they grouped other things, and in the beginning the two modes of grouping were merged to the point of being indistinct.

(Durkheim and Mauss, 1903/1963:82–83)

Sociology of Knowledge

Whereas the early Durkheim was concerned with differentiating sociology from philosophy, he now wanted to show that sociology could answer the most intractable philosophical questions. Philosophy had proposed two general models for how humans are able to develop concepts from their sense impressions. One, called *empiricism*, contends that our concepts are just generalizations from our sense impressions. The problem with this philosophy is that we seem to need some initial concepts such as space, time, and categories even to begin to group sense impressions together so that we can generalize from them. Consequently, another school of philosophy, *apriorism*, contends that we must be born with some initial categories of understanding. For Durkheim, this was really no explanation at all. How is it that we are born with these particular categories? How are they transmitted to each new generation? These are questions that Durkheim felt the philosophers could not answer. Instead, philosophers usually imply some sort of transcendental source. In other words, their philosophy has a religious character, and we already know what Durkheim thinks is the ultimate source of religion.

Durkheim contended that human knowledge is not a product of experience alone, nor are we just born with certain mental categories that are applied to experience. Instead our categories are social creations. They are collective representations. Marx

had already proposed a sociology of knowledge, but his was purely in the negative sense. Ideology was the distortion of our knowledge by social forces. In that sense, it was a theory of false knowledge. Durkheim offers a much more powerful sociology of knowledge that explains our “true” knowledge in terms of social forces.

Categories of Understanding

The Elementary Forms presents an argument for the social origin of six fundamental categories that some philosophers had identified as essential to human understanding: time, space, classification, force, causality, and totality. *Time* comes from the rhythms of social life. The category of *space* develops from the division of space occupied by society. We’ve already discussed how in totemism *classification* is tied to the human group. *Force* is derived from experiences with social forces. Imitative rituals are the origin of the concept of *causality*. Finally, society itself is the representation of *totality* (Nielsen, 1999). These descriptions are necessarily brief, but the important point is that the fundamental categories that allow us to transform our sense impressions into abstract concepts are derived from social experiences, in particular experiences of religious rituals. In these rituals, the bodily involvement of participants in the ritual’s sounds and movements creates feelings that give rise to the categories of understanding (Rawls, 2001).

Even if our abstract concepts are based on social experiences, this does not mean that our thoughts are determined by society. Remember that social facts acquire laws of development and association of their own, and they are not reducible to their source. Although social facts emerge out of other social facts, their subsequent development is autonomous. Consequently, even though these concepts have a religious source, they can develop into nonreligious systems. In fact, this is exactly what Durkheim sees as having happened with science. Rather than being opposed to religion, science has developed out of religion.

Despite their autonomous development, some categories are universal and necessary. This is the case because these categories develop in order to facilitate social interaction. Without them, all contact between individual minds would be impossible, and social life would cease. This explains why they are universal to humanity, because everywhere human beings have lived in societies. This also explains why they are necessary.

Hence society cannot leave the categories up to the free choice of individuals without abandoning itself. To live, it requires not only a minimum moral consensus but also a minimum logical consensus that it cannot do without either. Thus, in order to prevent dissidence, society weighs on its members with all its authority.

Does a mind seek to free itself from these norms of all thought? Society no longer considers this a human mind in the full sense, and treats it accordingly.

(Durkheim, 1912/1965:16)

Collective Effervescence

Nevertheless, there are times when even the most fundamental moral and cognitive categories can change or be created anew. Durkheim calls this *collective effervescence*

(Ono, 1996; Tiryakian, 1995). The notion of collective effervescence is not well spelled out in any of Durkheim's works. He seemed to have in mind, in a general sense, the great moments in history when a collectivity is able to achieve a new and heightened level of collective exaltation that in turn can lead to great changes in the structure of society. The Reformation and the Renaissance would be examples of historical periods when collective effervescence had a marked effect on the structure of society. As described later, effervescence is possible even in a classroom. It was during such a period of collective effervescence that the clan members created totemism. Collective effervescences are the decisive formative moments in social development. They are social facts at their birth.

To summarize Durkheim's theory of religion, society is the source of religion, the concept of God, and ultimately everything that is sacred (as opposed to profane). In a very real sense, then, we can argue that the sacred, God, and society are one and the same. Durkheim believed that this is fairly clear-cut in primitive society and that it remains true today, even though the relationship is greatly obscured by the complexities of modern society. To summarize Durkheim's sociology of knowledge, he claimed that concepts and even our most fundamental categories are collective representations that society produces, at least initially, through religious rituals. Religion is what connects society and the individual, because it is through sacred rituals that social categories become the basis for individual concepts.

Moral Education and Social Reform

Durkheim did not consider himself to be political and indeed avoided most partisan politics as not compatible with scientific objectivity. Nevertheless, as we've seen, most of his writings dealt with social issues, and, unlike some who see themselves as objective scientists today, he was not shy about suggesting specific social reforms, in particular regarding education and occupational associations. Mike Gane (2001:79) writes that Durkheim "believed the role of social science was to provide guidance for specific kinds of social intervention."

Durkheim saw problems in modern society as temporary aberrations and not as inherent difficulties (Fenton, 1984:45). Therefore, he believed in social reform. In taking this position, he stood in opposition to both the conservatives and the radicals of his day. Conservatives saw no hope in modern society and sought instead the restoration of the monarchy or of the political power of the Roman Catholic Church. Radicals like the socialists of Durkheim's time agreed that the world could not be reformed, but they hoped that a revolution would bring into existence socialism or communism.

Both Durkheim's programs for reform and his reformist approach were due to his belief that society is the source of any morality. His reform programs were dictated by the fact that society needs to be able to produce moral direction for the individual. To the extent that society is losing that capacity, it must be reformed. His reformist approach was dictated by the fact that the source for any reform has to be the actually

existing society. It does no good to formulate reform programs from the viewpoint of an abstract morality. The program must be generated by that society's social forces and not from some philosopher's, or even sociologist's, ethical system. "Ideals cannot be legislated into existence; they must be understood, loved and striven for by the body whose duty it is to realize them" (Durkheim, 1938/1977:38).

Morality

Durkheim offered courses and gave public lectures on moral education and the sociology of morals. And he intended, had he lived long enough, to culminate his oeuvre with a comprehensive presentation of his science of morals. The connection that Durkheim saw between sociology and morality has not until recently been appreciated by most sociologists:

It is not a coincidence, it seems to me, that the new emphasis on Durkheim should be in the areas of morality, philosophy, and intellectual milieu; it is indicative of a growing reflective need of sociology for ontological problems, those which relate professional concerns to the socio-historical situation of the profession. Whereas only a decade or so ago many sociologists might have been embarrassed if not vexed to discuss "ethics" and "morality," the increasing amorality and immorality of the public and private sectors of our society may be tacitly leading or forcing us back to fundamental inquiries, such as the moral basis of modern society, ideal and actual. This was a central theoretical and existential concern of Durkheim.

(Tiryakian, 1974:769)

As we have said, Durkheim was centrally concerned with morality, but it is not easy to classify his theory of morality according to the typical categories. On the one hand, he was a moral relativist who believed that ethical rules do and should change in response to other social facts. On the other hand, he was a traditionalist because he did not believe that one could simply create a new morality. Any new morality could only grow out of our collective moral traditions. He insisted that one must "see in morality itself a fact the nature of which one must investigate attentively, I would even say respectfully, before daring to modify" (Durkheim, cited in Bellah, 1973:xv). Durkheim's sociological theory of morality cuts across most of the positions concerning morality today and offers the possibility of a fresh perspective on contemporary debates over such issues as traditional families and the moral content of popular culture.

Morality, for Durkheim, has three components. First, morality involves discipline, that is, a sense of authority that resists idiosyncratic impulses. Second, morality involves attachment to society because society is the source of our morality. Third, it involves autonomy, a sense of individual responsibility for our actions.

Discipline

Durkheim usually discussed *discipline* in terms of constraint upon one's egoistic impulses. Such constraint is necessary because individual interests and group interests are not the same and may, at least in the short term, be in conflict. Discipline confronts one with one's moral duty, which, for Durkheim, is one's duty to society. As discussed above, this social discipline also makes the individual happier because it limits his or

her limitless desires and therefore provides the only chance of happiness for a being who otherwise would always want more.

Attachment

But Durkheim did not see morality as simply a matter of constraint. His second element in morality is *attachment* to social groups—the warm, voluntary, positive aspect of group commitment—not out of external duty but out of willing attachment.

It is society that we consider the most important part of ourselves. From this point of view, one can readily see how it can become the thing to which we are bound. In fact, we could not disengage ourselves from society without cutting ourselves off from ourselves. Between it and us there is the strongest and most intimate connection, since it is a part of our own being, since in a sense it constitutes what is best in us. . . . Consequently, . . . when we hold to ourselves, we hold to something other than ourselves. . . . Thus, just as morality limits and constrains us, in response to the requirements of our nature, so in requiring our commitment and subordination to the group does it compel us to realize ourselves.

(Durkheim, 1925/1961:71–72)

These two elements of morality—discipline and attachment—complement and support each other because they are both just different aspects of society. The former is society seen as making demands on us, and the latter is society seen as part of us.

Autonomy

The third element of morality is *autonomy*. Here Durkheim follows Kant's philosophical definition and sees it as a rationally grounded impulse of the will, with the sociological twist that the rational grounding is ultimately social.

Durkheim's focus on society as the source of morality has led many to assume that his ideal actor is one who is almost wholly controlled from without—a total conformist. However, Durkheim did not subscribe to such an extreme view of the actor: "Conformity must not be pushed to the point where it completely subjugates the intellect. Thus it does not follow from a belief in the need for discipline that it must be blind and slavish" (cited in Giddens, 1972:113).

Autonomy comes to full force in modernity only with the decline of the myths and symbols that previous moral systems used to demand discipline and encourage attachment. Durkheim believed that now that these myths have passed away, only scientific understanding can provide the foundation for moral autonomy. In particular, modern morality should be based on the relation between individuals and society as revealed by Durkheim's new science of sociology. The only way for this sociological understanding to become a true morality is through education.

Moral Education

Durkheim's most consistent attempts to reform society in order to enable a modern morality were directed at education (Dill, 2007). *Education* was defined by Durkheim as the process by which the individual acquires the physical, intellectual, and, most

important to Durkheim, moral tools needed to function in society (Durkheim, 1922/1956:71). As Lukes (1972:359) reports, Durkheim had always believed “that the relation of the science of sociology to education was that of theory to practice.” In 1902, he was given the powerful position of head of the Sorbonne’s education department. “It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that every young mind in Paris, in the decade prior to World War I, came directly or indirectly under his influence” (Gerstein, 1983:239).

Before Durkheim began to reform education there had been two approaches. One saw education as an extension of the church, and the other saw education as the unfolding of the natural individual. In contrast, Durkheim argued that education should help children develop a moral attitude toward society. He believed that the schools were practically the only existing institution that could provide a social foundation for modern morality.

For Durkheim, the classroom is a small society, and he concluded that its collective effervescence could be made powerful enough to inculcate a moral attitude. The classroom could provide the rich collective milieu necessary for reproducing collective representations (Durkheim, 1925/1961:229). This would allow education to present and reproduce all three elements of morality.

First, it would provide individuals with the discipline they need to restrain the passions that threaten to engulf them. Second, education could develop in the students a sense of devotion to society and to its moral system. Most important is education’s role in the development of autonomy, in which discipline is “freely desired,” and the attachment to society is by virtue of “enlightened assent” (Durkheim, 1925/1961:120).

For to teach morality is neither to preach nor to indoctrinate; it is to explain. If we refuse the child all explanation of this sort, if we do not try to help him understand the reasons for the rules he should abide by, we would be condemning him to an incomplete and inferior morality.

(Durkheim, 1925/1961:120–121)

Occupational Associations

As discussed, the primary problem that Durkheim saw in modern society was the lack of integration and regulation. Even though the cult of the individual provided a collective representation, Durkheim believed that there was a lack of social organizations that people could feel part of and that could tell people what they should and should not do. The modern state is too distant to influence most individuals. The church tends to integrate people by repressing freedom of thought. And the family is too particular and does not integrate individuals into society as a whole. As we’ve seen, the schools provided an excellent milieu for children. For adults, Durkheim proposed another institution: the *occupational association*.

Genuine moral commitments require a concrete group tied to the basic organizing principle of modern society, the division of labor. Durkheim proposed the development of occupational associations. All the workers, managers, and owners involved in a particular industry should join together in an association that would be both professional and social. Durkheim did not believe that there was a basic conflict of interest among the owners, managers, and workers within an industry. In this, of

course, he took a position diametrically opposed to that of Marx, who saw an essential conflict of interest between the owners and the workers. Durkheim believed that any such conflict occurred only because the various people involved lacked a common morality, which was traceable to the lack of an integrative structure. He suggested that the structure that was needed to provide this integrative morality was the occupational association, which would encompass “all the agents of the same industry united and organized into a single group” (Durkheim, 1893/1964:5). Such an organization was deemed to be superior to such organizations as labor unions and employer associations, which in Durkheim’s view served only to intensify the differences between owners, managers, and workers. Involved in a common organization, people in these categories would recognize their common interests as well as their common need for an integrative moral system. That moral system, with its derived rules and laws, would serve to counteract the tendency toward atomization in modern society as well as help stop the decline in the significance of collective morality.

Criticisms

As mentioned earlier, Durkheim’s reception into American sociology was strongly influenced by Talcott Parsons, who presented Durkheim as both a functionalist and a positivist. Although I don’t feel that these labels fairly characterize Durkheim’s position, a number of criticisms have been directed at his ideas on the basis of these characterizations. Since the sociology student is bound to come across these criticisms they are briefly addressed here.

Functionalism and Positivism

Durkheim’s focus on macro-level social facts was one of the reasons his work played a central role in the development of structural functionalism, which has a similar, macro-level orientation (see Chapter 7). However, whether Durkheim himself was a functionalist is open to debate and depends upon how one defines functionalism. Functionalism can be defined in two different ways, a weak sense and a strong sense. When Kingsley Davis (1959) said that all sociologists are functionalists, he referred to the weak sense: that functionalism is an approach that attempts “to relate the parts of society to the whole, and to relate one part to another.” A stronger definition of functionalism is given by Jonathan H. Turner and A. Z. Maryanski (1988), who define it as an approach that is based on seeing society as analogous to a biological organism and attempts to explain particular social structures in terms of the needs of society as a whole.

In this second sense, Durkheim was only an occasional and, one might say, accidental functionalist. Durkheim was not absolutely opposed to drawing analogies between biological organisms and social structures (Lehmann, 1993a:15), but he did not believe that sociologists can infer sociological laws by analogy with biology. Durkheim (1898/1974:1) called such inferences “worthless.”

Durkheim urged that we distinguish functions from the historical causes of social facts. The historical study is primary because social needs cannot simply call

structures into existence. Certainly, Durkheim's initial hypothesis was always that enduring social facts probably perform some sort of function, but he recognized that some social facts are historical accidents. Furthermore, we see in Durkheim no attempt to predefine the needs of society. Instead, the needs of a particular society can be established only by studying that society. Consequently, any functionalist approach must be preceded by a historical study.

Despite this theoretical injunction, it must be admitted that Durkheim did sometimes slip into functional analysis (J. Turner and Maryanski, 1988:111–112). Consequently, there are many places where one can fairly criticize Durkheim for assuming that societies as a whole have needs and that social structures automatically emerge to respond to these needs.

Durkheim also is often criticized for being a positivist, and indeed, he used the term to describe himself. However, as Robert Hall notes, the meaning of the term has changed:

The term "positive" was needed to distinguish the new approach from those of the philosophers who had taken to calling their ethical theories "scientific" and who used this term to indicate the dialectical reasoning they employed. In an age in which one could still speak of the "science" of metaphysics, the term "positive" simply indicated an empirical approach.

(Hall, 1987:137)

Today, positivism refers to the belief that social phenomena should be studied with the same methods as the natural sciences, and it is likely that Durkheim would accept this. However, it has also come to mean a focus on invariant laws (S. Turner, 1993), and we find little of that in Durkheim. Social facts were, for Durkheim, autonomous from their substrate, but also autonomous in their relation to other social facts. Each social fact required historical investigation, and none could be predicted on the basis of invariant laws.

Other Criticisms

There are some other problems with Durkheim's theory that need to be discussed. The first has to do with the crucial idea of a social fact. It is not at all clear that social facts can be approached in the objective manner that Durkheim recommends. Even such seemingly objective evidence for these social facts as a suicide rate can be seen as an accumulation of interpretations. In other words, whether a particular death is a suicide depends upon ascertaining the intention of a dead person (J. Douglas, 1967). This may be especially difficult in such cases as drug overdoses. In addition, the interpretation may be biased in a systemic manner so that, for example, deaths among those of high status may be less likely to be interpreted as suicides, even if the body is found clutching the fatal gun. Social facts and the evidence for them should always be approached as interpretations, and even the sociologist's own use of the social fact should be seen as such.

There are also some problems with Durkheim's view of the individual. Despite having made a number of crucial assumptions about human nature, Durkheim denied that he had done so. He argued that he did not begin by postulating a certain conception

of human nature in order to deduce a sociology from it. Instead, he said that it was from sociology that he sought an increasing understanding of human nature. However, Durkheim may have been less than honest with his readers, and perhaps even with himself.

One of Durkheim's assumptions about human nature—one that we have already encountered—may be viewed as the basis of his entire sociology. That assumption is that people are impelled by their passions into a mad search for gratification that always leads to a need for more. If these passions are unrestrained, they multiply to the point where the individual is enslaved by them and they become a threat to the individual as well as to society. It can be argued that Durkheim's entire theoretical edifice, especially his emphasis on collective morality, was erected on this basic assumption about people's passions. However, Durkheim provides no evidence for this assumption, and indeed, his own theories would suggest that such an insatiable subject may be a creation of social structures rather than the other way around.

In addition, Durkheim failed to give consciousness an active role in the social process. He treated the actor and the actor's mental processes as secondary factors or, more commonly, as dependent variables to be explained by the independent and decisive variables—social facts. Individuals are, in general, controlled by social forces in his theories; they do not actively control those forces. Autonomy, for Durkheim, meant nothing more than freely accepting those social forces. However, even if we accept that consciousness and some mental processes are types of social facts, there is no reason to suppose that they cannot develop the same autonomy that Durkheim recognized in other social facts. Just as science has developed its own autonomous rules, making its religious roots almost unrecognizable, couldn't consciousness do the same?

The final set of criticisms to be discussed here has to do with the centrality of morality in Durkheim's sociology. All sociologists are driven by moral concerns, but for Durkheim, morality was more than just the driving force behind sociology; it was also its ultimate goal. Durkheim believed that the sociological study of morality would produce a science of morality. As Everett White (1961:xx) wrote, "To say that the moral is an inevitable aspect of the social—is a far cry from asserting, as Durkheim does, that there can be a science of morality."

Furthermore, even without the fantasy of a science of morality, a sociology that attempts to determine what *should be done* from what *now exists* is inherently conservative. This conservatism is the most frequently cited criticism of Durkheim (Pearce, 1989). This is often attributed to his functionalism and positivism, but it is more correctly traced to the connection that he sees between morality and sociology. Whatever value there is in the scientific study of morality, it cannot relieve us of making moral choices. Indeed, it is likely that such study will make moral choice more difficult even as it makes us more flexible and responsive to changing social situations.

We should note, however, that Durkheim is not alone in having failed to work out the proper relation between morality and sociology. This problem disturbs modern sociology at least as much as it does Durkheim's theories. In an increasingly pluralistic culture, it is clear that we cannot just accept our moral traditions. For one thing,

it is impossible to say whose moral traditions we should accept. It is equally clear, thanks in part to Durkheim's insight, that we cannot just create a new morality that is separate from our moral traditions. A new morality must emerge, and it must emerge from our moral traditions, but what role sociology can and should play in this is a question that appears to be both unanswerable and unavoidable.

Summary

The two main themes in Durkheim's sociology were the priority of the social over the individual and the idea that society can be studied scientifically. These themes led to his concept of social facts. Social facts can be empirically studied, are external to the individual, are coercive of the individual, and are explained by other social facts. Durkheim differentiated between two basic types of social facts—material and nonmaterial. The most important focus for Durkheim was on nonmaterial social facts. He dealt with a number of them, including morality, collective conscience, collective representations, and social currents.

Durkheim's first major work was *The Division of Labor in Society*, in which he argued that the collective conscience of societies with mechanical solidarity had been replaced by a new organic solidarity based on mutual interdependence in a society organized by a division of labor. He investigated the difference between mechanical and organic solidarity through an analysis of their different legal systems. He argued that mechanical solidarity is associated with repressive laws while organic solidarity is associated with legal systems based on restitution.

Durkheim's next book, a study of suicide, is a good illustration of the significance of nonmaterial social facts in his work. In his basic causal model, changes in nonmaterial social facts ultimately cause differences in suicide rates. Durkheim differentiated among four types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic—and showed how each is affected by different changes in social currents. The study of suicide was taken by Durkheim and his supporters as evidence that sociology has a legitimate place in the social sciences. After all, it was argued, if sociology could explain so individualistic an act as suicide, it certainly could be used to explain other, less individual aspects of social life.

In his last major work, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim focused on another aspect of culture: religion. In his analysis of primitive religion, Durkheim sought to show the roots of religion in the social structure of society. It is society that defines certain things as sacred and others as profane. Durkheim demonstrated the social sources of religion in his analysis of primitive totemism and its roots in the social structure of the clan. Durkheim concluded that religion and society are one and the same, two manifestations of the same general process. He also presented a sociology of knowledge in this work. He claimed that concepts and even our most fundamental mental categories are collective representations that society produces, at least initially, through religious rituals.

Although Durkheim was against any radical change, his central concern with morality led him to propose two reforms in society that he hoped would lead to a stronger collective morality. For children, he successfully implemented a new program

for moral education in France that focused on teaching children discipline, attachment to society, and autonomy. For adults, he proposed occupational associations to restore collective morality and to cope with some of the curable pathologies of the modern division of labor.

The chapter concludes with some criticisms of Durkheim's theories. There are serious problems with his basic idea of the social fact, with his assumptions about human nature, and with his sociology of morality.

Max Weber

Chapter Outline

Methodology

Substantive Sociology

Criticisms

Max Weber (1864–1920) is probably the best known and most influential figure in sociological theory (Burger, 1993; R. Collins, 1985; Kalberg, 2000; Sica, 2001; Whimster, 2001, 2005).¹ Weber's work is so varied and subject to so many interpretations that it has influenced a wide array of sociological theories. It certainly had an influence on structural functionalism, especially through the work of Talcott Parsons. It has also come to be seen as important to the conflict tradition (R. Collins, 1975, 1990) and to critical theory, which was shaped almost as much by Weber's ideas as it was by Marx's orientation, as well as to Jurgen Habermas, the major inheritor of the critical-theory tradition (Outhwaite, 1994). Symbolic interactionists have been affected by Weber's ideas on *verstehen*, as well as by others of Weber's ideas. Alfred Schutz was powerfully affected by Weber's work on meanings and motives, and he, in turn, played a crucial role in the development of ethnomethodology (see Chapter 11). Recently, rational choice theorists have acknowledged their debt to Weber (Norkus, 2000). Weber was and is a widely influential theorist.

This chapter begins with a discussion of Weber's (1903–1917/1949) ideas on the methodology of the social sciences, which remain remarkably relevant and fruitful even today (Bruun, 2007; Ringer, 1997:171). A clear understanding of these ideas is necessary in dealing with Weber's substantive and theoretical ideas. Weber was opposed to pure abstract theorizing. Instead, his theoretical ideas are embedded in his empirical, usually historical, research. Weber's methodology shaped his research, and the combination of the two lies at the base of his theoretical orientation.

¹ For a time, his position was threatened by the increase in interest in the work of Karl Marx, who was already much better known to those in other fields and to the general public. But with the demise of world communism, Weber's position of preeminence seems secure once again.

Methodology

History and Sociology

Even though Weber was a student of, and took his first academic job in, law, his early career was dominated by an interest in history. As Weber moved more in the direction of the relatively new field of sociology, he sought to clarify its relationship to the established field of history. Although Weber felt that each field needed the other, his view was that the task of sociology was to provide a needed “service” to history (G. Roth, 1976:307). In Weber’s words, sociology performed only a “preliminary, quite modest task” (cited in R. Frank, 1976:21). Weber explained the difference between sociology and history: “Sociology seeks to formulate type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical processes. This distinguishes it from history, which is oriented to the causal analysis and explanation of individual actions, structures, and personalities possessing cultural significance” (1921/1968:19). Despite this seemingly clear-cut differentiation, in his own work Weber was able to combine the two. His sociology was oriented to the development of clear concepts so that he could perform a causal analysis of historical phenomena. Weber defined his ideal procedure as “the sure imputation of individual concrete events occurring in historical reality *to concrete, historically* given causes through the study of precise empirical data which have been selected from specific points of view” (1903–1917/1949:69). We can think of Weber as a historical sociologist.

Weber’s thinking on sociology was profoundly shaped by a series of intellectual debates (*Methodenstreit*) raging in Germany during his time. The most important of these debates was over the issue of the relationship between history and science. At the poles in this debate were those (the positivists [Halfpenny, 2005]) who thought that history was composed of general (*nomothetic*) laws and those (the subjectivists) who reduced history to idiosyncratic (*idiographic*) actions and events. (The positivists thought that history could be like a natural science; the subjectivists saw the two as radically different.) For example, a nomothetic thinker would generalize about social revolutions, whereas an idiographic analyst would focus on the specific events leading up to the American Revolution. Weber rejected both extremes and in the process developed a distinctive way of dealing with historical sociology. In Weber’s view, history is composed of unique empirical events; there can be no generalizations at the empirical level. Sociologists must, therefore, separate the empirical world from the conceptual universe that they construct. The concepts never completely capture the empirical world, but they can be used as heuristic tools for gaining a better understanding of reality. With these concepts, sociologists can develop generalizations, but these generalizations are not history and must not be confused with empirical.

Although Weber was clearly in favor of generalizing, he also rejected historians who sought to reduce history to a simple set of laws: “For the knowledge of historical phenomena in their concreteness, the most general laws, because they are devoid of content, are also the least valuable” (1903–1917/1949:80). For example, Weber rejected one historian (Wilhelm Roscher) who took as his task the search for the laws



MAX WEBER

A Biographical Sketch

Max Weber was born in Erfurt, Germany, on April 21, 1864, into a decidedly middle-class family (Radkau, 2009). Important differences between his parents had a profound effect upon both his intellectual orientation and his psychological development. His father was a bureaucrat

who rose to a relatively important political position. He was clearly a part of the political establishment and as a result eschewed any activity or idealism that would require personal sacrifice or threaten his position within the system. In addition, the senior Weber was a man who enjoyed earthly pleasures, and in this and many other ways he stood in sharp contrast to his wife. Max Weber's mother was a devout Calvinist, a woman who sought to lead an ascetic life largely devoid of the pleasures craved by her husband. Her concerns were more otherworldly; she was disturbed by the imperfections that were signs that she was not destined for salvation. These deep differences between the parents led to marital tension, and both the differences and the tension had an immense impact on Weber.

Because it was impossible to emulate both parents, Weber was presented with a clear choice as a child (Marianne Weber, 1975:62). He first seemed to opt for his father's orientation to life, but later he drew closer to his mother's approach. Whatever the choice, the tension produced by the need to choose between such polar opposites negatively affected Max Weber's psyche.

At age 18, Max Weber left home for a short time to attend the University of Heidelberg. Weber had already demonstrated intellectual precocity, but on a social level he entered Heidelberg shy and underdeveloped. However, that quickly changed after he gravitated toward his father's way of life and joined his father's old dueling fraternity. There he developed socially, at least in part because of the huge quantities of beer he consumed with his peers. In addition, he proudly displayed the dueling scars that were the trademark of such fraternities. Weber not only manifested his identity with his father's way of life in these ways but also chose, at least for the time being, his father's career—the law.

After three terms, Weber left Heidelberg for military service, and in 1884 he returned to Berlin and to his parents' home to take courses at the University of Berlin. He remained there for most of the next eight years as he completed his studies, earned his Ph.D., became a lawyer (see Turner and Factor, 1994, for a discussion of the impact of legal thinking on Weber's theorizing), and started teaching at the University of Berlin. In the process, his interests shifted more

of the historical evolution of a people and who believed that all peoples went through a typical sequence of stages (1903–1906/1975). As Weber put it, “The reduction of empirical reality . . . to ‘laws’ is meaningless” (1903–1917/1949:80). In other terms: “A systematic science of culture . . . would be senseless in itself” (Weber, 1903–1917/1949:84).

toward his lifelong concerns—economics, history, and sociology. During his eight years in Berlin, Weber was financially dependent on his father, a circumstance he progressively grew to dislike. At the same time, he moved closer to his mother's values, and his antipathy to his father increased. He adopted an ascetic life and plunged deeply into his work. For example, during one semester as a student, his work habits were described as follows: "He continues the rigid work discipline, regulates his life by the clock, divides the daily routine into exact sections for the various subjects, saves in his way, by feeding himself evenings in his room with a pound of raw chopped beef and four fried eggs" (Mitzman, 1969/1971:48; Marianne Weber, 1975:105). Thus Weber, following his mother, had become ascetic and diligent, a compulsive worker—in contemporary terms a "workaholic."

This compulsion for work led in 1896 to a position as professor of economics at Heidelberg. But in 1897, when Weber's academic career was blossoming, his father died following a violent argument between them. Shortly thereafter Weber began to manifest symptoms that were to culminate in a nervous breakdown. Often unable to sleep or to work, Weber spent the next six or seven years in near-total collapse. After a long hiatus, some of his powers began to return in 1903, but it was not until 1904, when he delivered (in the United States) his first lecture in six and a half years, that Weber was able to begin to return to active academic life. In 1904 and 1905, he published one of his best-known works, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In this work, Weber announced the ascendance of his mother's religion on an academic level. Weber devoted much of his time to the study of religion, though he was not personally religious.

Although he continued to be plagued by psychological problems, after 1904 Weber was able to function, indeed to produce some of his most important work. In these years, Weber published his studies of the world's religions in world-historical perspective (for example, China, India, and ancient Judaism). At the time of his death (June 14, 1920), he was working on his most important work, *Economy and Society* (1921/1968). Although this book was published, and subsequently translated into many languages, it was unfinished.

In addition to producing voluminous writings in this period, Weber undertook a number of other activities. He helped found the German Sociological Society in 1910. His home became a center for a wide range of intellectuals, including sociologists such as Georg Simmel, Robert Michels, and his brother Alfred Weber, as well as the philosopher and literary critic Georg Lukács (Scaff, 1989:186–222). In addition, Max Weber was active politically and wrote essays on the issues of the day.

There was a tension in Weber's life and, more important, in his work between the bureaucratic mind, as represented by his father, and his mother's religiosity. This unresolved tension permeates Weber's work as it permeated his personal life.

This view is reflected in various specific historical studies. For example, in his study of ancient civilizations, Weber admitted that although in some respects earlier times were precursors of things to come, "the long and continuous history of Mediterranean-European civilization does not show either closed cycles or linear progress. Sometimes

phenomena of ancient civilizations have disappeared entirely and then come to light again in an entirely new context” (1896–1906/1976:366).

In rejecting these opposing views of German historical scholarship, Weber fashioned his own perspective, which constituted a fusion of the two orientations. Weber felt that history (that is, historical sociology) was appropriately concerned with both individuality *and* generality. The unification was accomplished through the development and utilization of general concepts (what are later called “ideal types”) in the study of particular individuals, events, or societies. These general concepts are to be used “to identify and define the individuality of each development, the characteristics which made the one conclude in a manner so different from that of the other. Thus done, one can then determine the causes which led to the differences” (Weber, 1896–1906/1976:385). In doing this kind of causal analysis, Weber rejected, at least at a conscious level, the idea of searching for a single causal agent throughout history.² He instead used his conceptual arsenal to rank the various factors involved in a given historical case in terms of their causal significance (G. Roth, 1971).

Weber’s views on historical sociology were shaped in part by the availability of, and his commitment to the study of, empirical historical data. His was the first generation of scholars to have available reliable data on historical phenomena from many parts of the world (MacRae, 1974). Weber was more inclined to immerse himself in these historical data than he was to dream up abstract generalizations about the basic thrust of history. Although this led him to some important insights, it also created serious problems in understanding his work; he often got so involved in historical detail that he lost sight of the basic reasons for the historical study. In addition, the sweep of his historical studies encompassed so many epochs and so many societies that he could do little more than make rough generalizations (G. Roth, 1971). Despite these problems, Weber’s commitment to the scientific study of empirical phenomena made him attractive to the developing discipline of sociology in the United States.

In sum, Weber believed that history is composed of an inexhaustible array of specific phenomena. To study these phenomena, it was necessary to develop a variety of concepts designed to be useful for research on the real world. As a general rule, although Weber (as we will see) did not adhere to it strictly and neither do most sociologists and historians, the task of sociology was to develop these concepts, which history was to use in causal analyses of specific historical phenomena. In this way, Weber sought to combine the specific and the general in an effort to develop a science that did justice to the complex nature of social life.

Verstehen

Weber felt that sociologists had an advantage over natural scientists. That advantage resided in the sociologist’s ability to *understand* social phenomena, whereas the natural scientist could not gain a similar understanding of the behavior of an atom

² Ironically, Weber did seem (as we will see later in this chapter) to argue in his substantive work that there was such a causal agent in society—rationalization.

or a chemical compound. The German word for understanding is *verstehen* (Soeffner, 2005). Weber's special use of the term *verstehen* in his historical research is one of his best-known and most controversial contributions to the methodology of contemporary sociology. As I clarify what Weber meant by *verstehen*, I will also underscore some of the problems involved in his conceptualization of it. The controversy surrounding the concept of *verstehen*, as well as some of the problems involved in interpreting what Weber meant, grows out of a general problem with Weber's methodological thoughts. As Thomas Burger argued, Weber was neither very sophisticated nor very consistent in his methodological pronouncements (1976; see also Hekman, 1983:26). He tended to be careless and imprecise because he felt that he was simply repeating ideas that were well known in his day among German historians. Furthermore, as pointed out above, Weber did not think too highly of methodological reflections.

Weber's thoughts on *verstehen* were relatively common among German historians of his day and were derived from a field known as *hermeneutics* (R. Brown, 2005; M. Martin, 2000; Pressler and Dasilva, 1996). Hermeneutics was a special approach to the understanding and interpretation of published writings. Its goal was to understand the thinking of the author as well as the basic structure of the text. Weber and others (for example, Wilhelm Dilthey) sought to extend this idea from the understanding of texts to the understanding of social life:

Once we have realized that the historical method is nothing more or less than the classical method of interpretation applied to overt action instead of to texts, a method aiming at identifying a human design, a "meaning" behind observable events, we shall have no difficulty in accepting that it can be just as well applied to human interaction as to individual actors. From this point of view all history is interaction, which has to be interpreted in terms of the rival plans of various actors.
(Lachman, 1971:20)

In other words, Weber sought to use the tools of hermeneutics to understand actors, interaction, and indeed all of human history.³

One common misconception about *verstehen* is that it is simply the use of "intuition" by the researcher. Thus many critics see it as a "soft," irrational, subjective research methodology. However, Weber categorically rejected the idea that *verstehen* involved simply intuition, sympathetic participation, or empathy (1903–1917/1949). To him, *verstehen* involved doing systematic and rigorous research rather than simply getting a "feeling" for a text or social phenomenon. In other words, for Weber (1921/1968) *verstehen* was a rational procedure of study.

The key question in interpreting Weber's concept of *verstehen* is whether he thought that it was most appropriately applied to the subjective states of individual actors or to the subjective aspects of large-scale units of analysis (for example, culture). As we will see, Weber's focus on the cultural and social-structural contexts of action leads us to the view that *verstehen* is a tool for macro-level analysis.

³ Hermeneutics has become a major intellectual concern in recent years, especially in the work of Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Jurgen Habermas (Bleicher, 1980). For a strong argument in favor of using hermeneutics today, see Sica (1986), and for an appreciation of Weber's hermeneutics, see Oliver (1983).

Causality

Another aspect of Weber's methodology was his commitment to the study of causality (Ringer, 1997:75). Weber was inclined to see the study of the causes of social phenomena as being within the domain of history, not sociology. Yet to the degree that history and sociology cannot be clearly separated—and they certainly are not clearly separated in Weber's substantive work—the issue of causality is relevant to sociology. Causality is also important because it is, as we will see, another place in which Weber sought to combine nomothetic and idiographic approaches.

By *causality* Weber (1921/1968) simply meant the probability that an event will be followed or accompanied by another event. It was not, in his view, enough to look for historical constants, repetitions, analogies, and parallels, as many historians are content to do. Instead, the researcher has to look at the reasons for, as well as the meanings of, historical changes (G. Roth, 1971). Although Weber can be seen as having a one-way causal model—in contrast to Marx's dialectical mode of reasoning—in his substantive sociology he was always attuned to the interrelationships among the economy, society, polity, organization, social stratification, religion, and so forth (G. Roth, 1968). Thus, Weber operates with a multicausal approach in which “*hosts* of interactive influences are very often effective causal factors” (Kalberg, 1994:13).

Weber was quite clear on the issue of multiple causality in his study of the relationship between Protestantism and the spirit of capitalism. Although he is sometimes interpreted differently, Weber (1904–1905/1958) simply argued that the Protestant ethic was *one of* the causal factors in the rise of the modern spirit of capitalism. He labeled as “foolish” the idea that Protestantism was the sole cause. Similarly foolish, in Weber's view, was the idea that capitalism could have arisen “only” as a result of the Protestant Reformation; other factors could have led to the same result. Here is the way Weber made his point:

We shall as far as possible clarify the manner and the general *direction in which* . . . the religious movements have influenced the development of material culture. Only when this has been determined with reasonable accuracy can the attempt be made to estimate to what extent the historical development of modern culture can be attributed to those *religious forces* and to what extent to others.

(Weber, 1904–1905/1958:91–92; italics added)

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, as well as in most of the rest of his historical work, Weber was interested in the question of causality, but he did not operate with a simple one-way model; he was always attuned to the interrelationships among a number of social factors.

The critical thing to remember about Weber's thinking on causality is his belief that because we can have a special understanding of social life (*verstehen*), the causal knowledge of the social sciences is different from the causal knowledge of the natural sciences. As Weber put it: “‘Meaningfully’ interpretable human conduct (‘action’) is identifiable by reference to ‘valuations’ and meanings. For this reason, our criteria for *causal* explanation have a unique kind of satisfaction in the ‘historical’ explanation of such an ‘entity’” (1903–1906/1975:185). Thus the causal knowledge of the social scientist is different from the causal knowledge of the natural scientist.

Weber's thoughts on causality were intimately related to his efforts to come to grips with the conflict between nomothetic and idiographic knowledge. Those who subscribe to a nomothetic point of view would argue that there is a necessary relationship among social phenomena, whereas the supporters of an idiographic perspective would be inclined to see only random relationships among these entities. As usual, Weber took a middle position, epitomized in his concept of "adequate causality." The notion of *adequate causality* adopts the view that the best we can do in sociology is make probabilistic statements about the relationship between social phenomena; that is, if x occurs, then it is *probable* that y will occur. The goal is to "estimate the *degree* to which a certain effect is 'favored' by certain 'conditions' " (Weber, 1903–1917/1949:183).

Ideal Types

The ideal type is one of Weber's best-known contributions to contemporary sociology (Drysdale, 1996; Hekman, 1983; Lindbekk, 1992; McKinney, 1966; Zijderveld, 2005). As we have seen, Weber believed it was the responsibility of sociologists to develop conceptual tools, which could be used later by historians and sociologists. The most important such conceptual tool was the ideal type:

An ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* phenomena, which are arranged according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified *analytical* construct . . . In its conceptual purity, this mental construct . . . cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality.

(Weber, 1903–1917/1949:90)

In spite of this definition, Weber was not totally consistent in the way he used the ideal type. To grasp what the concept means initially, we will have to overlook some of the inconsistencies. At its most basic level, an *ideal type* is a concept constructed by a social scientist, on the basis of his or her interests and theoretical orientation, to capture the essential features of some social phenomenon.

The most important thing about ideal types is that they are heuristic devices; they are to be useful and helpful in doing empirical research and in understanding a specific aspect of the social world (or a "historical individual"). As Lachman said, an ideal type is "essentially a measuring rod" (1971:26), or in Kalberg's terms, a "yardstick" (1994:87). Here is the way Weber put it: "Its function is the comparison with empirical reality in order to establish its divergences or similarities, to describe them with the *most unambiguously intelligible concepts*, and to understand and explain them causally" (1903–1917/1949:43). Ideal types are heuristic devices to be used in the study of slices of historical reality. For example, social scientists would construct an ideal-typical bureaucracy on the basis of their immersion in historical data. This ideal type can then be compared to actual bureaucracies. The researcher looks for divergences in the real case from the exaggerated ideal type. Next, the social scientist must look for the causes of the deviations. Some typical reasons for these divergences are:

1. Actions of bureaucrats that are motivated by *misinformation*.
2. *Strategic errors*, primarily by the bureaucratic leaders.

3. *Logical fallacies* undergirding the actions of leaders and followers.
4. Decisions made in the bureaucracy on the basis of *emotion*.
5. *Any irrationality* in the action of bureaucratic leaders and followers.

To take another example, an ideal-typical military battle delineates the principal components of such a battle—opposing armies, opposing strategies, materiel at the disposal of each, disputed land (“no-man’s land”), supply and support forces, command centers, and leadership qualities. Actual battles may not have all these elements, and that is one thing a researcher wants to know. The basic point is that the elements of any particular military battle may be compared with the elements identified in the ideal type.

The elements of an ideal type (such as the components of the ideal-typical military battle) are not to be thrown together arbitrarily; they are combined on the basis of their compatibility. As Hekman puts it, “Ideal types are not the product of the whim or fancy of a social scientist, but are logically constructed concepts” (1983:32). (However, they can and should reflect the interests of the social scientist.)

In Weber’s view, the ideal type was to be derived inductively from the real world of social history. Weber did not believe that it was enough to offer a carefully defined set of concepts, especially if they were deductively derived from an abstract theory. The concepts had to be empirically adequate (G. Roth, 1971). Thus, in order to produce ideal types, researchers had first to immerse themselves in historical reality and then derive the types from that reality.

In line with Weber’s efforts to find a middle ground between nomothetic and idiographic knowledge, he argued that ideal types should be neither too general nor too specific. For example, in the case of religion he would reject ideal types of the history of religion in general, but he would also be critical of ideal types of very specific phenomena, such as an individual’s religious experience. Rather, ideal types are developed of intermediate phenomena such as Calvinism, Pietism, Methodism, and Baptism (Weber, 1904–1905/1958).

Although ideal types are to be derived from the real world, they are not to be mirror images of that world. Rather, they are to be one-sided exaggerations (based on the researcher’s interests) of the essence of what goes on in the real world. In Weber’s view, the more exaggerated the ideal type, the more useful it will be for historical research.

The use of the word *ideal* or *utopia* should not be construed to mean that the concept being described is in any sense the best of all possible worlds. As used by Weber, the term meant that the form described in the concept was rarely, if ever, found in the real world. In fact, Weber argued that the ideal type need not be positive or correct; it can just as easily be negative or even morally repugnant (1903–1917/1949).

Ideal types should make sense in themselves, the meaning of their components should be compatible, and they should aid us in making sense of the real world. Although we have come to think of ideal types as describing static entities, Weber believed that they could describe either static or dynamic entities. Thus we can have an ideal type of a structure, such as a bureaucracy, or of a social development, such as bureaucratization.

Ideal types also are not developed once and for all. Because society is constantly changing, and the interests of social scientists are as well, it is necessary to develop

new typologies to fit the changing reality. This is in line with Weber's view that there can be no timeless concepts in the social sciences (G. Roth, 1968).

Although I have presented a relatively unambiguous image of the ideal type, there are contradictions in the way Weber defined the concept. In addition, in his own substantive work, Weber used the ideal type in ways that differed from the ways he said it was to be used. As Burger noted, "The ideal types presented in *Economy and Society* are a mixture of definitions, classification, and specific hypotheses seemingly too divergent to be reconcilable with Weber's statements" (1976:118). Although she disagrees with Burger on Weber's inconsistency in defining ideal types, Hekman (1983:38–59) also recognizes that Weber offers several varieties of ideal types:

1. *Historical ideal types.* These relate to phenomena found in some particular historical epoch (for example, the modern capitalistic marketplace).
2. *General sociological ideal types.* These relate to phenomena that cut across a number of historical periods and societies (for example, bureaucracy).
3. *Action ideal types.* These are pure types of action based on the motivations of the actor (for example, affectual action).
4. *Structural ideal types.* These are forms taken by the causes and consequences of social action (for example, traditional domination).

Clearly Weber developed an array of varieties of ideal types, and some of the richness in his work stems from their diversity, although common to them all is their mode of construction.

Kalberg (1994) argues that while the heuristic use of ideal types in empirical research is important, it should not be forgotten that they also play a key *theoretical* role in Weber's work. Although Weber rejects the idea of theoretical laws, he does use ideal types in various ways to create theoretical models. Thus, ideal types constitute the theoretical building blocks for the construction of a variety of theoretical models (for example, the routinization of charisma and the rationalization of society—both of which are discussed later in this chapter), and these models are then used to analyze specific historical developments.

Values

Modern sociological thinking in America on the role of values in the social sciences has been shaped to a large degree by an interpretation, often simplistic and erroneous, of Weber's notion of *value-free* sociology (Hennis, 1994; McFalls, 2007). A common perception of Weber's view is that social scientists should *not* let their personal values influence their scientific research in any way. As we will see, Weber's work on values is far more complicated and should not be reduced to the simplistic notion that values should be kept out of sociology (Tribe, 1989:3).

Values and Teaching

Weber (1903–1917/1949) was most clear about the need for teachers to control their personal values in the classroom. From his point of view, academicians have a perfect right to express their personal values freely in speeches, in the press, and so forth,

but the academic lecture hall is different. Weber was opposed to those teachers who preached “their evaluations on ultimate questions ‘in the name of science’ in governmentally privileged lecture halls in which they are neither controlled, checked by discussion, nor subject to contradiction. . . . The lecture hall should be held separate from the arena of public discussion” (1903–1917/1949:4). The most important difference between a public speech and an academic lecture lies in the nature of the audience. A crowd watching a public speaker has chosen to be there and can leave at any time. But students, if they want to succeed, have little choice but to listen attentively to their professor’s value-laden positions. There is little ambiguity in this aspect of Weber’s position on value-freedom. The academician is to express “facts,” not personal values, in the classroom. Although teachers may be tempted to insert values because they make a course more interesting, teachers should be wary of employing values, because such values will “weaken the students’ taste for sober empirical analysis” (Weber, 1903–1917/1949:9). The only question is whether it is realistic to think that professors could eliminate most values from their presentations. Weber could adopt this position because he believed it possible to separate fact and value. However, Marx would disagree because in his view fact and value are intertwined, dialectically interrelated.

Values and Research

Weber’s position on the place of values in social research is far more ambiguous. Weber did believe in the ability to separate fact from value, and this view could be extended to the research world: “Investigator and teacher should keep unconditionally separate the establishment of empirical facts . . . and *his* own personal evaluations, i.e., his evaluation of these facts as satisfactory or unsatisfactory” (1903–1917/1949:11). He often differentiated between existential knowledge of what is and normative knowledge of what ought to be (Weber, 1903–1917/1949). For example, on the founding of the German Sociological Society, he said: “The Association rejects, in principle and definitely, all propaganda for action-oriented ideas from its midst.” Instead, the association was pointed in the direction of the study of “what is, why something is the way it is, for what historical and social reasons” (G. Roth, 1968:5).

However, several facts point in a different direction and show that despite the evidence described, Weber did not operate with the simplistic view that values should be totally eliminated from social research. While, as we will see, Weber perceived a role for values in a specific aspect of the research process, he thought that they should be kept out of the actual collection of research data. By this Weber meant that we should employ the regular procedures of scientific investigation, such as accurate observation and systematic comparison.

Values are to be restricted to the time before social research begins. They should shape the selection of what we choose to study. Weber’s (1903–1917/1949:21) ideas on the role of values prior to social research are captured in his concept of *value-relevance*. As with many of Weber’s methodological concepts, value-relevance is derived from the work of the German historicist Heinrich Rickert, for whom it involved “a selection of those parts of empirical reality which for human beings embody one

or several of those general cultural values which are held by people in the society in which the scientific observers live” (Burger, 1976:36). In historical research, this would mean that the choice of objects to study would be made on the basis of what is considered important in the particular society in which the researchers live. That is, they choose what to study of the past on the basis of the contemporary value system. In his specific case, Weber wrote of value-relevance from the “standpoint of the interests of the modern European” (1903–1917/1949:30). For example, bureaucracy was a very important part of the German society of Weber’s time, and he chose, as a result, to study that phenomenon (or the lack of it) in various historical settings.

Thus, to Weber, value judgments are not to be withdrawn completely from scientific discourse. Although Weber was opposed to confusing fact and value, he did not believe that values should be excised from the social sciences: “An *attitude of moral indifference* has no connection with *scientific* ‘objectivity’” (1903–1917/1949:60). He was prepared to admit that values have a certain place, though he warned researchers to be careful about the role of values: “It should be constantly made clear . . . exactly at which point the scientific investigator becomes silent and the evaluating and acting person begins to speak” (Weber, 1903–1917/1949:60). When expressing value positions, sociological researchers must always keep themselves and their audiences aware of those positions.

There is a gap between what Weber said and what he actually did. Weber was not afraid to express a value judgment, even in the midst of the analysis of historical data. For example, he said that the Roman state suffered from a convulsive sickness of its social body. It can be argued that in Weber’s actual work values not only were a basic device for selecting subjects to study but also were involved in the acquisition of meaningful knowledge of the social world. Gary Abraham (1992) has made the point that Weber’s work, especially his views on Judaism as a world religion, was distorted by his values. In his sociology of religion (discussed later in this chapter), Weber termed the Jews “pariah people.” Weber traced this position of outsider more to the desire of Jews to segregate themselves than to their exclusion by the rest of society. Thus Weber, accepting the general view of the day, argued that Jews would need to surrender Judaism in order to be assimilated into German society. Abraham argues that this sort of bias affected not only Weber’s ideas on Judaism, but his work in general. This casts further doubt on Weber as a “value-free” sociologist, as well as on the conventional view of Weber as a liberal thinker. As Abraham says, “Max Weber was probably as close to tolerant liberalism as majority Germany could offer at the time” (1992:22). Weber was more of a nationalist supporting the assimilation of minority groups than he was a classical liberal favoring pluralism, and those values had a profound effect on his work (G. Roth, 2000).

Most American sociologists regard Weber as an exponent of value-free sociology. The truth is that most American sociologists themselves subscribe to the idea of value-freedom, and they find it useful to invoke Weber’s name in support of their position. As we have seen, however, Weber’s work is studded with values.

One other aspect of Weber’s work on values worth noting is his ideas on the role of the social sciences in helping people make choices among various ultimate

value positions. Basically, Weber's view is that there is *no* way of scientifically choosing among alternative value positions. Thus, social scientists cannot presume to make such choices for people. "The social sciences, which are strictly empirical sciences, are the least fitted to presume to save the individual the difficulty of making a choice" (Weber, 1903–1917/1949:19). The social scientist can derive certain factual conclusions from social research, but this research cannot tell people what they "ought" to do. Empirical research can help people choose an adequate means to an end, but it cannot help them choose that end as opposed to other ends. Weber says, "It can never be the task of an empirical science to provide binding norms and ideals from which directions for immediate practical activity can be derived" (1903–1917/1949:52).

Substantive Sociology

We turn now to Weber's substantive sociology. We begin, as did Weber in his monumental *Economy and Society*, at the levels of action and interaction, but we will soon encounter the basic paradox in Weber's work: despite his seeming commitment to a sociology of small-scale processes, his work is primarily at the large-scale levels of the social world. (Many Weberians would disagree with this portrayal of paradox in Weber's work. Kalberg [1994], for example, argues that Weber offers a more fully integrated micro-macro, or agency-structure, theory.)

What Is Sociology?

In articulating his view on sociology, Weber often took a stance against the large-scale evolutionary sociology, the organicism, that was preeminent in the field at the time. For example, Weber said: "I became one [a sociologist] in order to put an end to collectivist notions. In other words, sociology, too, can only be practiced by proceeding from the action of one or more, few or many, individuals, that means, by employing a strictly 'individualist' method" (G. Roth, 1976:306). Despite his stated adherence to an "individualist" method, Weber was forced to admit that it is impossible to eliminate totally collective ideas from sociology.⁴ But even when he admitted the significance of collective concepts, Weber ultimately reduced them to patterns and regularities of individual action: "For the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as *solely* the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action" (1921/1968:13).

At the individual level, Weber was deeply concerned with meaning, and the way in which it was formed. There seems little doubt that Weber believed in, and intended to undertake, a microsociology. But is that, in fact, what he did? Guenther Roth, one of Weber's foremost interpreters, provides us with an unequivocal answer in his

⁴ In fact, Weber's ideal types *are* collective concepts.

description of the overall thrust of *Economy and Society*: “the first strictly *empirical comparison of social structure and normative order in world-historical depth*” (1968: xxvii). Mary Fulbrook directly addresses the discontinuity in Weber’s work:

Weber’s overt emphasis on the importance of [individual] meanings and motives in causal explanation of social action does not correspond adequately with the true mode of explanation involved in his comparative-historical studies of the world religions. Rather, the ultimate level of causal explanation in Weber’s substantive writings is that of the social-structural conditions under which certain forms of meaning and motivation can achieve historical efficacy.

(Fulbrook, 1978:71)

Lars Udehn (1981) has cast light on this problem in interpreting Weber’s work by distinguishing between Weber’s methodology and his substantive concerns and recognizing that there is a conflict or tension between them. In Udehn’s view, Weber uses an “individualist and subjectivist methodology” (1981:131). In terms of the latter, Weber is interested in what individuals do and why they do it (their subjective motives). In the former, Weber is interested in reducing collectivities to the actions of individuals. However, in most of his substantive sociology (as we will see), Weber focuses on large-scale structure (such as bureaucracy or capitalism) and is not focally concerned with what individuals do or why they do it.⁵ Such structures are not reduced by Weber to the actions of individuals, and the actions of those in them are determined by the structures, not by their motives. There is little doubt that there is an enormous contradiction in Weber’s work, and it will concern us through much of this chapter.

With this as background, we are now ready for Weber’s definition of *sociology*: “Sociology . . . is a *science* concerning itself with the *interpretive understanding of social action* and thereby with a *causal* explanation of its course and consequences” (1921/1968:4). Among the themes discussed earlier that are mentioned or implied in this definition are the following:

Sociology should be a science.

Sociology should be concerned with causality. (Here, apparently, Weber was combining sociology and history.)

Sociology should utilize interpretive understanding (*verstehen*).

We are now ready for what Weber meant by social action.

Social Action

Weber’s entire sociology, if we accept his words at face value, was based on his conception of social action (S. Turner, 1983). He differentiated between action and purely reactive behavior. The concept of behavior is reserved, then as now, for automatic behavior that involves no thought processes. A stimulus is presented and behavior occurs, with little intervening between stimulus and response. Such behavior was

⁵ Udehn argues that one exception is Weber’s analysis of the behavior of leaders.

not of interest in Weber's sociology. He was concerned with action that clearly involved the intervention of thought processes (and the resulting meaningful action) between the occurrence of a stimulus and the ultimate response. To put it slightly differently, action was said to occur when individuals attached subjective meanings to their action. To Weber, the task of sociological analysis involved "the interpretation of action in terms of its subjective meaning" (1921/1968:8). A good, and more specific, example of Weber's thinking on action is found in his discussion of *economic action*, which he defined as "a *conscious, primary* orientation to economic consideration . . . for what matters is not the objective necessity of making economic provision, but the belief that it is necessary" (1921/1968:64).

In embedding his analysis in mental processes and the resulting meaningful action, Weber (1921/1968) was careful to point out that it is erroneous to regard psychology as the foundation of the sociological interpretation of action. Weber seemed to be making essentially the same point made by Durkheim in discussing at least some nonmaterial social facts. That is, sociologists are interested in mental processes, but this is not the same as psychologists' interest in the mind, personality, and so forth.

Although Weber implied that he had a great concern with mental processes, he actually spent little time on them. Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills called attention to Weber's lack of concern with mental processes: "Weber sees in the concept of personality a much abused notion referring to a profoundly irrational center of creativity, a center before which analytical inquiry comes to a halt" (1958:55). Schutz (1932/1967) was quite correct when he pointed out that although Weber's work on mental processes is suggestive, it is hardly the basis for a systematic microsociology. But it was the suggestiveness of Weber's work that made him relevant to those who developed theories of individuals and their behavior—symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and so forth.

In his action theory, Weber's clear intent was to focus on individuals and patterns and regularities of action and not on the collectivity. "Action in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behavior exists only as the behavior of one or more *individual* human beings" (Weber, 1921/1968:13). Weber was prepared to admit that for some purposes we may have to treat collectivities as individuals, "but for the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as *solely* the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action" (1921/1968:13). It would seem that Weber could hardly be more explicit: the sociology of action is ultimately concerned with individuals, *not* collectivities.

Weber utilized his ideal-type methodology to clarify the meaning of *action* by identifying four basic types of action. Not only is this typology significant for understanding what Weber meant by action, but it is also, in part, the basis for Weber's concern with larger social structures and institutions. Of greatest importance is Weber's differentiation between the two basic types of rational action. The first is *means-ends rationality*, or action that is "determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used

as ‘conditions’ or ‘means’ for the attainment of the actor’s own rationally pursued and calculated ends” (Weber, 1921/1968:24). The second is *value rationality*, or action that is “determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects for success” (Weber, 1921/1968:24–25). *Affectual* action (which was of little concern to Weber) is determined by the emotional state of the actor. *Traditional* action (which was of far greater concern to Weber) is determined by the actor’s habitual and customary ways of behaving.

It should be noted that although Weber differentiated four ideal-typical forms of action, he was well aware that any given action usually involves a combination of all four ideal types of action. In addition, Weber argued that sociologists have a much better chance of understanding action of the more rational variety than they do of understanding action dominated by affect or tradition.

We turn now to Weber’s thoughts on social stratification, or his famous ideas on class, status, and party (or power). His analysis of stratification is one area in which Weber does operate, at least at first, as an action theorist.

Class, Status, and Party

One important aspect of this analysis is that Weber refused to reduce stratification to economic factors (or class, in Weber’s terms) but saw it as multidimensional. Thus, society is stratified on the bases of economics, status, and power. One resulting implication is that people can rank high on one or two of these dimensions of stratification and low on the other (or others), permitting a far more sophisticated analysis of social stratification than is possible when stratification is simply reduced (as it was by some Marxists) to variations in one’s economic situation.

Starting with class, Weber adhered to his action orientation by arguing that a class is not a community. Rather, a class is a group of people whose shared situation is a possible, and sometimes frequent, basis for action by the group (K. Smith, 2007). Weber contends that a “class situation” exists when three conditions are met:

- (1) A number of people have in common a specific causal component of their life chances, insofar as
- (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and
- (3) is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor markets. This is “class situation.”

(Weber, 1921/1968:927)

The concept of “class” refers to any group of people found in the same class situation. Thus a class is *not* a community but merely a group of people in the same economic, or market, situation.

In contrast to class, status does normally refer to communities; status groups are ordinarily communities, albeit rather amorphous ones. “Status situation” is defined by Weber as “every typical component of the life of men that is determined by a specific, positive or negative, social estimation of *honor*” (1921/1968:932). As a general rule, status is associated with a style of life. (Status relates to consumption of goods produced, whereas class relates to economic production.) Those at the top of the status hierarchy have a different lifestyle than do those at the bottom. In this case,

lifestyle, or status, is related to class situation. But class and status are not necessarily linked to one another: “Money and an entrepreneurial position are not in themselves status qualifications, although they may lead to them; and the lack of property is not in itself a status disqualification, although this may be a reason for it” (Weber, 1921/1968:306). There is a complex set of relationships between class and status, and it is made even more complicated when we add the dimension of party.

While classes exist in the economic order and status groups in the social order, parties can be found in the political order. To Weber, parties “are always *structures* struggling for domination” (cited in Gerth and Mills, 1958:195; italics added). Thus, parties are the most organized elements of Weber’s stratification system. Weber thinks of parties very broadly as including not only those that exist in the state but also those that may exist in a social club. Parties usually, but not always, represent class or status groups. Whatever they represent, parties are oriented to the attainment of power.

While Weber remained close to his action approach in his ideas on social stratification, these ideas already indicate a movement in the direction of macro-level communities and structures. In most of his other work, Weber focused on such large-scale units of analysis. Not that Weber lost sight of the action; the actor simply moved from being the focus of his concern to being largely a dependent variable determined by a variety of large-scale forces. For example, as we will see, Weber believed that individual Calvinists are impelled to act in various ways by the norms, values, and beliefs of their religion, but his focus was not on the individual but on the collective forces that impel the actor.

Structures of Authority

Weber’s sociological interest in the structures of authority was motivated, at least in part, by his political interests (Eliaeson, 2000). Weber was no political radical; in fact, he was often called the “bourgeois Marx” to reflect the similarities in the intellectual interests of Marx and Weber as well as their very different political orientations. Although Weber was almost as critical of modern capitalism as Marx was, he did not advocate revolution. He wanted to change society gradually, not overthrow it. He had little faith in the ability of the masses to create a “better” society. But Weber also saw little hope in the middle classes, which he felt were dominated by shortsighted, petty bureaucrats. Weber was critical of authoritarian political leaders like Bismarck. Nevertheless, for Weber the hope—if indeed he had any hope—lay with the great political leaders rather than with the masses or the bureaucrats. Along with his faith in political leaders went his unswerving nationalism. He placed the nation above all else: “The vital interests of the nation stand, of course, above democracy and parliamentarianism” (Weber, 1921/1968:1383). Weber preferred democracy as a political form not because he believed in the masses but because it offered maximum dynamism and the best milieu to generate political leaders (Mommson, 1974). Weber noted that authority structures exist in every social institution, and his political views were related to his analysis of these structures in all settings. Of course, they were most relevant to his views on the polity.

Weber began his analysis of authority structures in a way that was consistent with his assumptions about the nature of action. He defined *domination* as the “probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (Weber, 1921/1968:212). Domination can have a variety of bases, legitimate as well as illegitimate, but what mainly interested Weber were the legitimate forms of domination, or what he called *authority* (Leggewie, 2005). What concerned Weber, and what played a central role in much of his sociology, were the three bases on which authority is made legitimate to followers—rational, traditional, and charismatic. In defining these three bases, Weber remained fairly close to his ideas on individual action, but he rapidly moved to the large-scale structures of authority.

Authority legitimized on *rational* grounds rests “on a belief in the legality of enacted rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands” (Weber, 1921/1968:215). Authority legitimized on *traditional* grounds is based on “an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions and the legitimacy of those exercising authority under them” (Weber, 1921/1968:215). Finally, authority legitimized by *charisma*⁶ rests on the devotion of followers to the exceptional sanctity, exemplary character, heroism, or special powers (for example, the ability to work miracles) of leaders, as well as on the normative order sanctioned by them. All these modes of legitimizing authority clearly imply individual actors, thought processes (beliefs), and actions. But from this point, Weber, in his thinking about authority, did move quite far from an individual action base, as we will see when we discuss the authority structures erected on the basis of these types of legitimacy.

Rational-Legal Authority

Rational-legal authority can take a variety of structural forms, but the form that most interested Weber was *bureaucracy*, which he considered “the purest type of exercise of legal authority” (1921/1968:220).

Ideal-Typical Bureaucracy Weber depicted bureaucracies in ideal-typical terms:

From a purely technical point of view, a bureaucracy is capable of attaining the highest degree of efficiency, and is in this sense formally the most rational known means of exercising authority over human beings. It is superior to any other form in precision, in stability, in the stringency of its discipline, and in its reliability. It thus makes possible a particularly high degree of calculability of results for the heads of the organization and for those acting in relation to it. It is finally superior both in intensive efficiency and in the scope of its operations and is formally capable of application to all kinds of administrative tasks.

(Weber, 1921/1968:223)

Despite his discussion of the positive characteristics of bureaucracies, here and elsewhere in his work, there is a fundamental ambivalence in his attitude toward them. Although he detailed their advantages, he was well aware of their problems. Weber expressed various reservations about bureaucratic organizations. For example,

⁶ The term *charisma* is used in Weber’s work in a variety of other ways and contexts as well; see Miyahara (1983).

he was cognizant of the “red tape” that often makes dealing with bureaucracies so trying and so difficult. His major fear, however, was that the rationalization that dominates all aspects of bureaucratic life was a threat to individual liberty. As Weber put it:

No machinery in the world functions so precisely as this apparatus of men and, moreover, so cheaply. . . . Rational calculation . . . reduces every worker to a cog in this bureaucratic machine and, seeing himself in this light, he will merely ask how to transform himself into a somewhat bigger cog. . . . The passion for bureaucratization drives us to despair.

(Weber, 1921/1968:liiii)

Weber was appalled by the effects of bureaucratization and, more generally, of the rationalization of the world of which bureaucratization is but one component, but he saw no way out. He described bureaucracies as “escape proof,” “practically unshatterable,” and among the hardest institutions to destroy once they are established. Along the same lines, he felt that individual bureaucrats could not “squirm out” of the bureaucracy once they were “harnessed” in it (for a less ominous view of bureaucratization, see Klagge, 1997). Weber concluded that “the future belongs to bureaucratization” (1921/1968:1401), and time has borne out his prediction.

Weber would say that his depiction of the advantages of bureaucracy is part of his ideal-typical image of the way it operates. The ideal-typical bureaucracy is a purposeful exaggeration of the rational characteristics of bureaucracies. Such an exaggerated model is useful for heuristic purposes and for studies of organizations in the real world, but it is not to be mistaken for a realistic depiction of the way bureaucracies actually operate.

Weber distinguished the ideal-typical bureaucracy from the ideal-typical bureaucrat. He conceived of bureaucracies as structures and of bureaucrats as positions within those structures. He did *not*, as his action orientation might lead us to expect, offer a social psychology of organizations or of the individuals who inhabit those bureaucracies (as modern symbolic interactionists might).

The ideal-typical bureaucracy is a type of organization. Its basic units are offices organized in a hierarchical manner with rules, functions, written documents, and means of compulsion. All these are, to varying degrees, large-scale structures that represent the thrust of Weber’s thinking. He could, after all, have constructed an ideal-typical bureaucracy that focused on the thoughts and actions of individuals within the bureaucracy. There is a whole school of thought in the study of organizations that focuses precisely on this level rather than on the structures of bureaucracies (see, for example, Blankenship, 1977).

The following are the major characteristics of the ideal-typical bureaucracy:

1. It consists of a continuous organization of official functions (offices) bound by rules.
2. Each office has a specified sphere of competence. The office carries with it a set of obligations to perform various functions, the authority to carry out these functions, and the means of compulsion required to do the job.
3. The offices are organized into a hierarchical system.

4. The offices may carry with them technical qualifications that require that the participants obtain suitable training.
5. The staff that fills these offices does not own the means of production associated with them;⁷ staff members are provided with the use of those things that they need to do the job.
6. The incumbent is not allowed to appropriate the position; it always remains part of the organization.
7. Administrative acts, decisions, and rules are formulated and recorded in writing.

Any Alternatives? A bureaucracy is one of the rational structures that is playing an ever-increasing role in modern society, but one may wonder whether there is any alternative to the bureaucratic structure. Weber's clear and unequivocal answer was that there is no possible alternative: "The needs of mass administration make it today completely indispensable. The choice is only between bureaucracy and dilettantism in the field of administration" (1921/1968:223).

Although we might admit that bureaucracy is an intrinsic part of modern capitalism, we might ask whether a socialist society might be different. Is it possible to create a socialist society without bureaucracies and bureaucrats? Once again, Weber was unequivocal: "When those subject to bureaucratic control seek to escape the influence of existing bureaucratic apparatus, this is normally possible only by creating an organization of their own which is equally subject to the process of bureaucratization" (1921/1968:224). In fact, Weber believed that in the case of socialism we would see an increase, not a decrease, in bureaucratization. If socialism were to achieve a level of efficiency comparable to capitalism, "it would mean a tremendous increase in the importance of professional bureaucrats" (Weber, 1921/1968:224). In capitalism, at least the owners are not bureaucrats and therefore would be able to restrain the bureaucrats, but in socialism, even the top-level leaders would be bureaucrats. Weber thus believed that even with its problems "capitalism presented the best chances for the preservation of individual freedom and creative leadership in a bureaucratic world" (Mommsen, 1974:xv). We are once again at a key theme in Weber's work: his view that there is really no hope for a better world. Socialists can, in Weber's view, only make things worse by expanding the degree of bureaucratization in society. Weber noted: "Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but rather a polar night of icy darkness and hardness, no matter which group may triumph externally now" (cited in Gerth and Mills, 1958:128).

Any Hope? A ray of hope in Weber's work—and it is a small one—is that professionals who stand outside the bureaucratic system can control it to some degree. In this category, Weber included professional politicians, scientists, intellectuals (Sadri, 1992), and even capitalists, as well as the supreme heads of the bureaucracies. For example, Weber said that politicians "must be the countervailing force against bureaucratic domination" (1921/1968:1417). His famous essay "Politics as a Vocation" is

⁷ Here and elsewhere in his work Weber adopts a Marxian interest in the means of production. This is paralleled by his concern with alienation, not only in the economic sector but throughout social life (science, politics, and so forth).

basically a plea for the development of political leaders with a calling to oppose the rule of bureaucracies and of bureaucrats. But in the end these appear to be rather feeble hopes. In fact, a good case can be made that these professionals are simply another aspect of the rationalization process and that their development serves only to accelerate that process (Nass, 1986; Ritzer, 1975c; Ritzer and Walczak, 1988).

In Weber's "'Churches' and 'Sects' in North America: An Ecclesiastical Socio-Political Sketch" (1906/1985), Colin Loader and Jeffrey Alexander (1985) see a forerunner of Weber's thoughts on the hope provided by an ethic of responsibility in the face of the expansion of bureaucratization. American sects such as the Quakers practice an ethic of responsibility by combining rationality and larger values. Rogers Brubaker defines the *ethic of responsibility* as "the passionate commitment to ultimate values with the dispassionate analysis of alternative means of pursuing them" (1984:108). He contrasts this to the *ethic of conviction*, in which a rational choice of means is foregone and the actor orients "his action to the realization of some absolute value or unconditional demand" (1984:106; for a somewhat different view, see N. Gane, 1997). The ethic of conviction often involves a withdrawal from the rational world, whereas the ethic of responsibility involves a struggle within that world for greater humanness. The ethic of responsibility provides at least a modicum of hope in the face of the onslaught of rationalization and bureaucratization.

Traditional Authority

Whereas rational-legal authority stems from the legitimacy of a rational-legal system, traditional authority is based on a claim by the leaders, and a belief on the part of the followers, that there is virtue in the sanctity of age-old rules and powers. The leader in such a system is not a superior but a personal master. The administrative staff, if any, consists not of officials but mainly of personal retainers. In Weber's words, "Personal loyalty, not the official's impersonal duty, determines the relations of the administrative staff to the master" (1921/1968:227). Although the bureaucratic staff owes its allegiance and obedience to enacted rules and to the leader, who acts in their name, the staff of the traditional leader obeys because the leader carries the weight of tradition—he or she has been chosen for that position in the traditional manner.

Weber was interested in the staff of the traditional leader and how it measured up to the ideal-typical bureaucratic staff. He concluded that it was lacking on a number of counts. The traditional staff lacks offices with clearly defined spheres of competence that are subject to impersonal rules. It also does not have a rational ordering of relations of superiority and inferiority; it lacks a clear hierarchy. There is no regular system of appointment and promotion on the basis of free contracts. Technical training is not a regular requirement for obtaining a position or an appointment. Appointments do not carry with them fixed salaries paid in money.

Weber also used his ideal-type methodology to analyze historically the different forms of traditional authority. He differentiated between two very early forms of traditional authority. A *gerontocracy* involves rule by elders, whereas *primary patriarchy* involves leaders who inherit their positions. Both of these forms have a supreme chief but lack an administrative staff. A more modern form is *patrimonialism*, which is traditional domination with an administration and a military force that are

purely personal instruments of the master (Andrew Eisenberg, 1998). Still more modern is *feudalism*, which limits the discretion of the master through the development of more routinized, even contractual, relationships between leader and subordinate. This restraint, in turn, leads to more stabilized power positions than exist in patrimonialism. All four of these forms may be seen as structural variations of traditional authority, and all of them differ significantly from rational-legal authority.

Weber saw structures of traditional authority, in any form, as barriers to the development of rationality. This is our first encounter with an overriding theme in Weber's work—factors that facilitate or impede the development of (formal) rationality. Over and over we find Weber concerned, as he was here, with the structural factors conducive to rationality in the Western world and the structural and cultural impediments to the development of a similar rationality throughout the rest of the world. In this specific case, Weber argued that the structures and practices of traditional authority constitute a barrier to the rise of rational economic structures—in particular, capitalism—as well as to various other components of a rational society. Even patrimonialism—a more modern form of traditionalism—while permitting the development of certain forms of “primitive” capitalism, does not allow for the rise of the highly rational type of capitalism characteristic of the modern West.

Charismatic Authority

Charisma is a concept that has come to be used very broadly (Adair-Toteff, 2005; Oakes, 1997; S. Turner, 2003; Werbner and Basu, 1998). The news media and the general public are quick to point to a politician, a movie star, or a rock musician as a charismatic individual. By this they most often mean that the person in question is endowed with extraordinary qualities. The concept of charisma plays an important role in the work of Max Weber, but his conception of it was very different from that held by most laypeople today. Although Weber did not deny that a charismatic leader may have outstanding characteristics, his sense of charisma was more dependent on the group of disciples and the way that they *define* the charismatic leader (D. N. Smith, 1998). To put Weber's position bluntly, if the disciples define a leader as charismatic, then he or she is likely to be a charismatic leader irrespective of whether he or she actually possesses any outstanding traits. A charismatic leader, then, can be someone who is quite ordinary. What is crucial is the process by which such a leader is set apart from ordinary people and treated as if endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least exceptional powers or qualities that are not accessible to the ordinary person (Miyahara, 1983).

Charisma and Revolution To Weber, charisma was a revolutionary force, one of the most important revolutionary forces in the social world. Whereas traditional authority clearly is inherently conservative, the rise of a charismatic leader may well pose a threat to that system (as well as to a rational-legal system) and lead to a dramatic change in that system. What distinguishes charisma as a revolutionary force is that it leads to changes in the minds of actors; it causes a “subjective or internal reorientation.” Such changes may lead to “a radical alteration of the central attitudes and direction of action with a completely new orientation of all attitudes toward different

problems of the world” (Weber, 1921/1968:245). Although Weber was here addressing changes in the thoughts and actions of individuals, such changes are clearly reduced to the status of dependent variables. Weber focused on changes in the structure of authority, that is, the rise of charismatic authority. When such a new authority structure emerges, it is likely to change people’s thoughts and actions dramatically.

The other major revolutionary force in Weber’s theoretical system, and the one with which he was much more concerned, is (formal) rationality. Whereas charisma is an internal revolutionary force that changes the minds of actors, Weber saw (formal) rationality as an external revolutionary force changing the structures of society first and then ultimately the thoughts and actions of individuals. There is more to be said about rationality as a revolutionary force later, but this closes the discussion of charisma as a revolutionary factor because Weber had very little to say about it. Weber was interested in the revolutionary character of charisma as well as its structure and the necessity that its basic character be transformed and routinized in order for it to survive as a system of authority.

Charismatic Organizations and the Routinization of Charisma In his analysis of charisma, Weber began, as he did with traditional authority, with the ideal-typical bureaucracy. He sought to determine to what degree the structure of charismatic authority, with its disciples and staff, differs from the bureaucratic system. Compared to that of the ideal-typical bureaucracy, the staff of the charismatic leader is lacking on virtually all counts. The staff members are not technically trained but are chosen instead for their possession of charismatic qualities or, at least, of qualities similar to those possessed by the charismatic leader. The offices they occupy form no clear hierarchy. Their work does not constitute a career, and there are no promotions, clear appointments, or dismissals. The charismatic leader is free to intervene whenever he or she feels that the staff cannot handle a situation. The organization has no formal rules, no established administrative organs, and no precedents to guide new judgments. In these and other ways, Weber found the staff of the charismatic leader to be “greatly inferior” to the staff in a bureaucratic form of organization.

Weber’s interest in the organization behind the charismatic leader and the staff that inhabits it led him to the question of what happens to charismatic authority when the leader dies. After all, a charismatic system is inherently fragile; it would seem to be able to survive only as long as the charismatic leader lives. But is it possible for such an organization to live after the leader dies? The answer to this question is of the greatest consequence to the staff members of the charismatic leader, for they are likely to live on after the leader dies. They are also likely to have a vested interest in the continued existence of the organization: if the organization ceases to exist, they are out of work. Thus the challenge for the staff is to create a situation in which charisma in some adulterated form persists even after the leader’s death. It is a difficult struggle because, for Weber, charisma is by its nature unstable; it exists in its pure form only as long as the charismatic leader lives.

In order to cope with the departure of the charismatic leader, the staff (as well as the followers) may adopt a variety of strategies to create a more lasting organization. The staff may search out a new charismatic leader, but even if the search is

successful, the new leader is unlikely to have the same aura as his or her predecessor. A set of rules also may be developed that allows the group to identify future charismatic leaders. But such rules rapidly become tradition, and what was charismatic leadership is on the way toward becoming traditional authority. In any case, the nature of leadership is radically changed as the purely personal character of charisma is eliminated. Still another technique is to allow the charismatic leader to designate his or her successor and thereby to transfer charisma symbolically to the next in line. Again it is questionable whether this is ever very successful or whether it can be successful in the long run. Another strategy is having the staff designate a successor and having its choice accepted by the larger community. The staff could also create ritual tests, with the new charismatic leader being the one who successfully undergoes the tests. However, all these efforts are doomed to failure. In the long run, charisma cannot be routinized and still be charisma; it must be transformed into either traditional or rational-legal authority (or into some sort of institutionalized charisma like the Catholic Church).

Indeed, we find a basic theory of history in Weber's work. If successful, charisma almost immediately moves in the direction of routinization. But once routinized, charisma is en route to becoming either traditional or rational-legal authority. Once it achieves one of those states, the stage is set for the cycle to begin all over again. However, despite a general adherence to a cyclical theory, Weber believed that a basic change has occurred in the modern world and that we are more and more likely to see charisma routinized in the direction of rational-legal authority. Furthermore, he saw rational systems of authority as stronger and as increasingly impervious to charismatic movements. The modern, rationalized world may well mean the death of charisma as a significant revolutionary force (Seligman, 1993). Weber contended that rationality—not charisma—is the most irresistible and important revolutionary force in the modern world.

Types of Authority and the “Real World”

In this section, the three types of authority are discussed as ideal types, but Weber was well aware that in the real world, any specific form of authority involves a combination of all three. Thus we can think of Franklin D. Roosevelt as a president of the United States who ruled on all three bases. He was elected president in accordance with a series of rational-legal principles. By the time he was elected president for the fourth time, a good part of this rule had traditional elements. Finally, many disciples and followers regarded him as a charismatic leader (McCann, 1997).

Although the three forms of authority are presented here as parallel structures, in the real world there is constant tension and, sometimes, conflict among them. The charismatic leader is a constant threat to the other forms of authority. Once in power, the charismatic leader must address the threat posed to him or her by the other two forms. Even if charismatic authority is successfully routinized, there then arises the problem of maintaining its dynamism and its original revolutionary qualities. Then there is the conflict produced by the constant development of rational-legal authority and the threat it poses to the continued existence of the other forms. If Weber was right, however, we might face a future in which the tension among the three forms

of authority is eliminated, a world of the uncontested hegemony of the rational-legal system. This is the “iron cage” of a totally rationalized society that worried Weber so much. In such a society, the only hope lies with isolated charismatic individuals who manage somehow to avoid the coercive power of society. But a small number of isolated individuals hardly represent a significant hope in the face of an increasingly powerful bureaucratic machine.

Rationalization

There has been a growing realization in recent years that rationalization lies at the heart of Weber’s substantive sociology (Brubaker, 1984; R. Collins, 1980; Eisen, 1978; Kalberg, 1980, 1990; D. Levine, 1981a; Ritzer, 2008b; Scaff, 2005, 1989; Schluchter, 1981; Sica, 1988). As Kalberg put it, “It *is* the case that Weber’s interest in a broad and overarching theme—the ‘specific and peculiar “rationalism” of Western culture’ and its unique origins and development—stands at the center of his sociology” (1994:18). However, it is difficult to extract a clear definition of *rationalization* from Weber’s work.⁸ In fact, Weber operated with a number of different definitions of the term, and he often failed to specify which definition he was using in a particular discussion (Brubaker, 1984:1). As we saw earlier, Weber did define *rationality*; indeed, he differentiated between two types—means–ends and value rationality. However, these concepts refer to types of *action*. They are the basis of, but not coterminous with, Weber’s larger-scale sense of rationalization. Weber is interested in far more than fragmented action orientations; his main concern is with regularities and patterns of action within civilizations, institutions, organizations, strata, classes, and groups. Donald Levine (1981a) argues that Weber is interested in “objectified” rationality, that is, action that is in accord with some process of external systematization. Stephen Kalberg (1980) performs a useful service by identifying four basic types of (“objective”) rationality in Weber’s work. (Levine offers a very similar differentiation.) These types of rationality were “the basic heuristic tools [Weber] employed to scrutinize the historical fates of rationalization as sociocultural processes” (Kalberg, 1980:1172; for an application, see Takayama, 1998).

Types of Rationality

The first type is *practical rationality*, which is defined by Kalberg as “every way of life that views and judges worldly activity in relation to the individual’s purely pragmatic and egoistic interests” (1980:1151). People who practice practical rationality accept given realities and merely calculate the most expedient ways of dealing with the difficulties that they present. This type of rationality arose with the severing of the bonds of primitive magic, and it exists trans-civilizationally and trans-historically; that is, it is not restricted to the modern Occident. This type of rationality stands in opposition to anything that threatens to transcend everyday routine. It leads people to

⁸ It might be argued that there is no single definition because the various forms of rationality are so different from one another that they preclude such a definition. I would like to thank Jere Cohen for this point.

distrust all impractical values, either religious or secular-utopian, as well as the theoretical rationality of the intellectuals, the type of rationality to which we now turn.

Theoretical rationality involves a cognitive effort to master reality through increasingly abstract concepts rather than through action. It involves such abstract cognitive processes as logical deduction, induction, attribution of causality, and the like. This type of rationality was accomplished early in history by sorcerers and ritualistic priests and later by philosophers, judges, and scientists. Unlike practical rationality, theoretical rationality leads the actor to transcend daily realities in a quest to understand the world as a meaningful cosmos. Like practical rationality, it is trans-civilizational and trans-historical. The effect of intellectual rationality on action is limited. In that it involves cognitive processes, it need not affect action taken, and it has the potential to introduce new patterns of action only indirectly.

Substantive rationality (like practical rationality but *not* theoretical rationality) directly orders action into patterns through clusters of values. Substantive rationality involves a choice of means to ends within the context of a system of values. One value system is no more (substantively) rational than another. Thus, this type of rationality also exists trans-civilizationally and trans-historically, wherever consistent value postulates exist.

Finally, and most important from Kalberg's point of view, is *formal rationality*, which involves means–ends calculation (Cockerham, Abel, and Luschen, 1993). But whereas in practical rationality this calculation occurs in reference to pragmatic self-interests, in formal rationality it occurs with reference to “universally applied rules, laws, and regulations.” As Brubaker puts it, “Common to the rationality of industrial capitalism, formalistic law and bureaucratic administration is its objectified, institutionalized, supra-individual form; in each sphere, rationality is embodied in the social structure and confronts individuals as something external to them” (1984:9). Weber makes this quite clear in the specific case of bureaucratic rationalization:

Bureaucratic rationalization . . . revolutionizes with *technical means*, in principle, as does every economic reorganization, “from without”: It *first* changes the material and social orders, and *through* them the people, by changing the conditions of adaptation, and perhaps the opportunities for adaptation, through a rational determination of means and ends.

(Weber, 1921/1968:1116)

Although all the other types of rationality are trans-civilizational and epoch-transcending, formal rationality arose only in the West with the coming of industrialization. The universally applied rules, laws, and regulations that characterize formal rationality in the West are found particularly in the economic, legal, and scientific institutions, as well as in the bureaucratic form of domination. Thus, we have already encountered formal rationality in our discussion of rational-legal authority and the bureaucracy.

An Overarching Theory?

Although Weber had a complex, multifaceted sense of rationalization, he used it most powerfully and meaningfully in his image of the modern Western world, especially in the capitalistic economy (R. Collins, 1980; Weber, 1927/1981) and bureaucratic

organizations (I. Cohen, 1981:xxxii; Weber, 1921/1968:956–1005), as an iron cage (Mitzman, 1969/1971; Tiryakian, 1981) of formally rational structures. Weber described capitalism and bureaucracies as “two great rationalizing forces” (1921/1968:698).⁹ In fact, Weber saw capitalism and bureaucracies as being derived from the same basic sources (especially innerworldly asceticism), involving similarly rational and methodical action, and reinforcing one another and in the process furthering the rationalization of the Occident.¹⁰ In Weber’s (1921/1968:227, 994) view, the only real rival to the bureaucrat in technical expertise and factual knowledge was the capitalist.

However, if we take Weber at his word, it is difficult to argue that he had an overarching theory of rationalization. He rejected the idea of “general evolutionary sequence” (Weber, 1927/1981:34). He was critical of thinkers like Hegel and Marx, who he felt offered general, teleological theories of society. In his own work, he tended to shy away from studies of, or proclamations about, whole societies. Instead, he tended to focus, in turn, on social structures and institutions such as bureaucracy, stratification, law, the city, religion, the polity, and the economy. Lacking a sense of the whole, he was unlikely to make global generalizations, especially about future directions. Furthermore, the rationalization process that Weber described in one social structure or institution was usually quite different from the rationalization of another structure or institution. As Weber put it, the process of rationalization assumes “unusually varied forms” (1922–1923/1958:293; see also Weber, 1921/1958:30; 1904–1905/1958:78), and “the history of rationalism shows a development which by no means follows parallel lines in the various departments of life” (1904–1905/1958:77; see also Brubaker, 1984:9; Kalberg, 1980:1147). Weber also looked at many things other than rationalization in his various comparative-historical studies (Kalberg, 1994).

This being said, it is clear that Weber does have a deep concern for the overarching effect of the formal rationalization of the economy and bureaucracies on the Western world (Brubaker, 1984). For example, in *Economy and Society*, Weber says:

This whole process of rationalization in the factory as elsewhere, and especially in the bureaucratic state machine, parallels the centralization of the material implements of organization in the hands of the master. Thus, discipline inexorably takes over ever larger areas as the satisfaction of political and economic needs is increasingly rationalized. This universal phenomenon more and more restricts the importance of charisma and of individually differentiated conduct.

(Weber, 1921/1968:1156)

Formal rationalization will be our main, but certainly not only, concern in this section.

⁹ In the 1920 introduction to *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber focused on “a specially trained organization of officials” (bureaucracy) in his discussion of rationalization, but he also mentioned capitalism in the same context as “the most fateful force in our modern life.”

¹⁰ Of course, these are not completely distinct because large capitalistic enterprises are one of the places in which we find bureaucracies (Weber, 1922–1923/1958:299). However, Weber also sees the possibility that bureaucracies can stand in opposition to, can impede, capitalism.

Formal and Substantive Rationality

Various efforts have been made to delineate the basic characteristics of formal rationality. In my view, formal rationality may be defined in terms of six basic characteristics (Ritzer, 1983, 2008b): (1) Formally rational structures and institutions emphasize *calculability*, or those things that can be counted or quantified. (2) There is a focus on *efficiency*, on finding the best means to a given end. (3) There is great concern with ensuring *predictability*, or that things operate in the same way from one time or place to another. (4) A formally rational system progressively reduces human technology and ultimately *replaces human technology with nonhuman technology*. Nonhuman technologies (such as computerized systems) are viewed as more calculable, more efficient, and more predictable than human technologies. (5) Formally rational systems seek to gain *control* over an array of uncertainties, especially the uncertainties posed by human beings who work in, or are served by, them. (6) Rational systems tend to have a series of *irrational consequences* for the people involved with them and for the systems themselves, as well as for the larger society (Sica, 1988). One of the irrationalities of rationality, from Weber's point of view, is that the world tends to become less enchanted, less magical, and ultimately less meaningful to people (MacKinnon, 2001; Ritzer, 2005a; M. Schneider, 1993).¹¹

Formal rationality stands in contrast to all the other types of rationality but is especially in conflict with substantive rationality (Brubaker, 1984:4). Kalberg argues that Weber believed that the conflict between these two types of rationality played "a particularly fateful role in the unfolding of rationalization processes in the West" (1980:1157).

In addition to differentiating among the four types of rationality, Kalberg deals with their capacity to introduce methodical ways of life. Practical rationality lacks this ability because it involves reactions to situations rather than efforts to order them. Theoretical rationality is cognitive and therefore has a highly limited ability to suppress practical rationality and seems to be more of an end product than a producer. To Weber, substantive rationality is the *only* type with the "potential to introduce methodical ways of life" (Kalberg, 1980:1165). Thus, in the West, a particular substantive rationality with an emphasis on a methodical way of life—Calvinism—subjugated practical rationality and led to the development of formal rationality.

Weber's fear was that substantive rationality was becoming less significant than the other types of rationality, especially formal rationality, in the West. Thus practitioners of formal rationality, like the bureaucrat and the capitalist, were coming to dominate the West, and the type that "embodied Western civilization's highest ideals: the autonomous and free individual whose actions were given continuity by their reference to ultimate values" (Kalberg, 1980:1176) was fading away (for an alternative view on this, see Titunik, 1997).

¹¹ However, Mark Schneider argues that Weber overstated the case and that in spite of rationalization, parts of the world continue to be enchanted: "Enchantment, we suggest, is part of our normal condition, and far from having fled with the rise of science [one of Weber's rationalized systems], it continues to exist (though often unrecognized) wherever our capacity to explain the world's behavior is slim, that is, where neither science nor practical knowledge seem of much utility" (1993:x). Ritzer (2005a) argues that disenchanting realms will try to find ways to, at least, temporarily be reenchanted. This is particularly true of consumer-driven economic systems that depend on enchanted consumers.

Rationalization in Various Social Settings

Although the differences among Weber's four types of rationalization have been emphasized here; there are a number of commonalities among them. Thus, as I move from setting to setting, I, like Weber, focus sometimes on rationalization in general and at other times on the specific types of rationalization.

Economy Engerman (2000:258) argues that, although this is rarely cited, "Weber laid out much of the methodological underpinning to what is conventionally called neoclassical economics." This includes the ideal type, methodological individualism, and, most important, rationality and rationalization. The most systematic presentation of Weber's thoughts on the rationalization of the economic institution is to be found in his *General Economic History*. Weber's concern is with the development of the rational capitalistic economy in the Occident, which is a specific example of a rational economy defined as a "functional organization oriented to money-prices which originate in the interest-struggles of men in the *market*" (Weber, 1915/1958:331). Although there is a general evolutionary trend, Weber, as always, is careful to point out that there are various sources of capitalism, alternative routes to it, and a range of results emanating from it (Swedberg, 1998). In fact, in the course of rejecting the socialistic theory of evolutionary change, Weber rejects the whole idea of a "general evolutionary sequence" (1927/1981:34).

Weber begins by depicting various irrational and traditional forms, such as the household, clan, village, and manorial economies. For example, the lord of the manor in feudalism was described by Weber as being traditionalistic, "too lacking in initiative to build up a business enterprise in a large scale into which the peasants would have fitted as a labor force" (1927/1981:72). However, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Occident, feudalism began to break down as the peasants and the land were freed from control by the lord and a money economy was introduced. With this breakdown, the manorial system "showed a strong tendency to develop in a capitalistic direction" (Weber, 1927/1981:79).

At the same time, in the Middle Ages, cities were beginning to develop. Weber focuses on the largely urban development of industry involved in the transformation of raw materials. Especially important to Weber is the development of such industrial production beyond the immediate needs of the house community. Notable here is the rise of free craftsmen in the cities. They developed in the Middle Ages in the Occident because, for one thing, this society had developed consumptive needs greater than those of any other. In general, there were larger markets and more purchasers, and the peasantry had greater purchasing power. On the other side, forces operated against the major alternative to craftsmen—slaves. Slavery was found to be too unprofitable and too unstable, and it was made increasingly more unstable by the growth of the towns that offered freedom to the slaves.

In the Occident, along with free craftsmen came the development of the *guild*, defined by Weber as "an organization of craft workers specialized in accordance with the type of occupation . . . [with] internal regulation of work and monopolization against outsiders" (1927/1981:136). Freedom of association was also characteristic of the guilds. But although rational in many senses, guilds also had traditional,

anticapitalistic aspects. For example, one master was not supposed to have more capital than another, and this requirement was a barrier to the development of large capitalistic organizations.

As the Middle Ages came to a close, the guilds began to disintegrate. This disintegration was crucial because the traditional guilds stood in the way of technological advance. With the dissolution of the guild system came the rise of the domestic system of production, especially the “putting out” system in the textile industry. In such a system, production was decentralized, with much of it taking place within the homes of the workers. Although domestic systems were found throughout the world, it was only in the Occident that the owners controlled the means of production (for example, tools, raw materials) and provided them to the workers in exchange for the right to dispose of the product. Whereas a fully developed domestic system developed in the West, it was impeded in other parts of the world by such barriers as the clan system (China), the caste system (India), traditionalism, and the lack of free workers.

Next, Weber details the development of the workshop (a central work setting without advanced machinery) and then the emergence of the factory in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. In Weber’s view, the factory did not arise out of craft work or the domestic system, but alongside them. Similarly, the factory was not called into existence by advances in machinery; the two developments were correlated with each other. The factory was characterized by free labor that performed specialized and coordinated activities, ownership of the means of production by the entrepreneur, the fixed capital of the entrepreneur, and the system of accounting that is indispensable to such capitalization. Such a factory was, in Weber’s view, a capitalistic organization. In addition to the development of the factory, Weber details the rise of other components of a modern capitalistic economy, such as advanced machinery, transportation systems, money, banking, interest, bookkeeping systems, and so on.

What most clearly defines modern rational capitalistic enterprises for Weber is their calculability, which is best represented in their reliance on modern bookkeeping. Isolated calculable enterprises existed in the past in the Occident as well as in other societies. However, an entire society is considered capitalistic only when the everyday requirements of the population are supplied by capitalistic methods and enterprises. Such a society is found only in the Occident, and there only since the mid-nineteenth century.

The development of a capitalistic system hinged on a variety of developments within the economy as well as within the larger society. Within the economy, some of the prerequisites included a free market with large and steady demand, a money economy, inexpensive and rational technologies, a free labor force, a disciplined labor force, rational capital-accounting techniques, and the commercialization of economic life involving the use of shares, stocks, and the like. Many of the economic prerequisites were found only in the Occident. Outside the economy, Weber identified a variety of needed developments, such as a modern state with “professional administration, specialized officialdom, and law based on the concept of citizenship” (1927/1981:313), rational law “made by jurists and rationally interpreted and applied” (1927/1981:313), cities, and modern science and technology. To these Weber adds a

factor that will concern us in the next section: “a rational ethic for the conduct of life . . . a religious basis for the ordering of life which consistently followed out must lead to explicit rationalism” (1927/1981:313–314). Like the economic prerequisites, these noneconomic presuppositions occurred together only in the Occident. The basic point is that a rational economy is dependent upon a variety of noneconomic forces throughout the rest of society in order to develop.

Religion Although we will focus on the rationalization of religion in this section, Weber spent much time analyzing the degree to which early, more primitive religions—and religions in much of the world—acted as impediments to the rise of rationality. Weber noted that “the sacred is the uniquely unalterable” (1921/1968:406). Despite this view, religion in the West did prove to be alterable; it was amenable to rationalization, and it did play a key role in the rationalization of other sectors of society (Kalberg, 1990).

Early religion was composed of a bewildering array of gods, but with rationalization, a clear and coherent set of gods (a pantheon) emerged. Early religions had household gods, kin-group gods, local political gods, and occupational and vocational gods. We get the clear feeling that Weber did believe that a cultural force of (theoretical) rationality impelled the emergence of this set of gods: “*Reason* favored the primacy of universal gods; and every consistent crystallization of a pantheon followed systematic *rational* principles” (1921/1968:417). A pantheon of gods was not the only aspect of the rationalization of religion discussed by Weber. He also considered the delimitation of the jurisdiction of gods, monotheism, and the anthropomorphization of gods as part of this development. Although the pressure for rationalization exists in many of the world’s religions, in areas outside the Western world, the barriers to rationalization more than counterbalance the pressures for rationalization.

Although Weber had a cultural conception of rationalization, he did not view it simply as a force “out there” that impels people to act. He did not have a group-mind concept. In religion, rationalization is tied to concrete groups of people, in particular to priests. Specifically, the professionally trained priesthood is the carrier¹² and the expeditor of rationalization. In this, priests stand in contrast to magicians, who support a more irrational religious system. The greater rationality of the priesthood is traceable to several factors. Members go through a systematic training program, whereas the training of magicians is unsystematic. Also, priests are fairly highly specialized, whereas magicians tend to be unspecialized. Finally, priests possess a systematic set of religious concepts, and this, too, sets them apart from magicians. We can say that priests are both the products and the expeditors of the process of rationalization.

The priesthood is not the only group that plays a key role in rationalization. Prophets and a laity are also important in the process. Prophets can be distinguished from priests by their personal calling, their emotional preaching, their proclamation of a doctrine, and the fact that they tend to be unpopular and to work alone. The key

¹² For a general discussion of the role of carriers in Weber’s work, see Kalberg (1994:58–62).

role of the prophet is the mobilization of the laity, because there would be no religion without a group of followers. Unlike priests, prophets do not tend to the needs of a congregation. Weber differentiated between two types of prophets: ethical and exemplary. *Ethical prophets* (Muhammad, Jesus Christ, and the Old Testament prophets) believe that they have received a commission directly from God and demand obedience from followers as an ethical duty. *Exemplary prophets* (Buddha is a model) demonstrate to others by personal example the way to religious salvation. In either case, successful prophets are able to attract large numbers of followers, and it is this mass, along with the priests, that forms the heart of religion. Prophets are likely at first to attract a personal following, but it is necessary that that group be transformed into a permanent congregation. Once such a laity has been formed, major strides have been made in the direction of the rationalization of religion.

Prophets play a key initial role, but once a congregation is formed, they are no longer needed. In fact, because they are largely irrational, they represent a barrier to that rationalization of religion. A conflict develops between priests and prophets, but it is a conflict that must be won in the long run by the more rational priesthood. In their conflict, the priests are aided by the rationalization proceeding in the rest of society. As the secular world becomes more and more literate and bureaucratized, the task of educating the masses falls increasingly to the priests, whose literacy gives them a tremendous advantage over the prophets. In addition, while the prophets tend to do the preaching, the priests take over the task of day-to-day pastoral care. Although preaching is important during extraordinary times, pastoral care, or the daily religious cultivation of the laity, is an important instrument in the growing power of the priesthood. It was the church in the Western world that combined a rationalized pastoral character with an ethical religion to form a peculiarly influential and rational form of religion. This rationalized religion proved particularly well suited to winning converts among the urban middle class, and it was there that it played a key role in the rationalization of economic life as well as all other sectors of life.

Law As with his analysis of religion, Weber began his treatment of law with the primitive, which he saw as highly irrational. Primitive law was a rather undifferentiated system of norms. For example, no distinction was made between a civil wrong (a tort) and a crime. Thus cases involving differences over a piece of land and homicide were likely to be handled, and offenders punished, in much the same way. In addition, primitive law tended to lack any official machinery. Vengeance dominated reactions to a crime, and law was generally free from procedural formality or rules. Leaders, especially, were virtually unrestrained in what they could do to followers. From this early irrational period, Weber traced a direct line of development to a formalized legal procedure. And as was usual in Weber's thinking, it is only in the West that a rational, systematic theory of law is held to have developed.

Weber traced several stages in the development of a more rational legal system (Shamir, 1993). An early stage involves charismatic legal revelation through law prophets. Then there is the empirical creation and founding of law by honorary legal officials. Later there is the imposition of law by secular or theocratic powers. Finally, in the most modern case, we have the systematic elaboration of law and professionalized

administration of justice by persons who have received their legal training formally and systematically.

In law, as in religion, Weber placed great weight on the process of professionalization: the legal profession is crucial to the rationalization of Western law. There are certainly other factors (for example, the influence of Roman law), but the legal profession was central to his thinking: “Formally elaborated law constituting a complex of maxims consciously applied in decisions has never come into existence without the decisive cooperation of trained specialists” (Weber, 1921/1968:775). Although Weber was aware that there was a series of external pressures—especially from the rationalizing economy—impelling law toward rationalization, his view was that the most important force was the internal factor of the professionalization of the legal profession (1921/1968:776).

Weber differentiated between two types of legal training but saw only one as contributing to the development of rational law. The first is *craft training*, in which apprentices learn from masters, primarily during the actual practice of law. This kind of training produces a formalistic type of law dominated by precedents. The goal is not the creation of a comprehensive, rational system of law but, instead, the production of practically useful precedents for dealing with recurring situations. Because these precedents are tied to specific issues in the real world, a general, rational, and systematic body of law cannot emerge.

In contrast, *academic legal training* laid the groundwork for the rational law of the West. In this system, law is taught in special schools where the emphasis is placed on legal theory and science—in other words, where legal phenomena are given rational and systematic treatment. The legal concepts produced have the character of abstract norms. Interpretation of these laws occurs in a rigorously formal and logical manner. They are general, in contrast to the specific, precedent-bound laws produced in the case of craft training.

Academic legal training leads to the development of a rational legal system with a number of characteristics, including the following:

1. Every concrete legal decision involves the application of abstract legal propositions to concrete situations.
2. It must be possible in every concrete case to derive the decision logically from abstract legal propositions.
3. Law must tend to be a gapless system of legal propositions or at least be treated as one.
4. The gapless legal system should be applicable to all social actions.

Weber seemed to adopt the view that history has seen law evolve from a cultural system of norms to a more structured system of formal laws. In general, actors are increasingly constrained by a more and more rational legal system. Although this is true, Weber was too good a sociologist to lose sight completely of the independent significance of the actor. For one thing, Weber (1921/1968:754–755) saw actors as crucial in the emergence of, and change in, law. However, the most important aspect of Weber’s work in this area—for the purposes of this discussion—is the degree to which law is regarded as part of the general process of rationalization throughout the West.

Polity The rationalization of the political system is intimately linked to the rationalization of law and, ultimately, to the rationalization of all elements of the social system. For example, Weber argued that the more rational the political structure becomes, the more likely it is to eliminate systematically the irrational elements within the law. A rational polity cannot function with an irrational legal system, and vice versa. Weber did not believe that political leaders follow a conscious policy of rationalizing the law; rather, they are impelled in that direction by the demands of their own increasingly rational means of administration. Once again, Weber took the position that actors are being impelled by structural (the state) and cultural (rationalization) forces.

Weber defined the *polity* as “a community whose social action is aimed at subordinating to orderly domination by the participants a territory and the conduct of the persons within it, through readiness to resort to physical force, including normally force of arms” (1921/1968:901). This type of polity has existed neither everywhere nor always. It does not exist as a separate entity where the task of armed defense against enemies is assigned to the household, the neighborhood association, an economic group, and so forth. Although Weber clearly viewed the polity as a social structure, he was more careful to link his thinking here to his individual action orientations. In his view, modern political associations rest on the prestige bestowed upon them by their members.

As was his usual strategy, Weber went back to the primitive case in order to trace the development of the polity. He made it clear that violent social action is primordial. However, the monopolization and rational ordering of legitimate violence did not exist in early societies but evolved over the centuries. Not only is rational control over violence lacking in primitive society, but other basic functions of the modern state either are totally absent or are not ordered in a rational manner. Included here would be functions like legislation, police, justice, administration, and the military. The development of the polity in the West involves the progressive differentiation and elaboration of these functions. But the most important step is their subordination under a single, dominant, rationally ordered state.

The City Weber was also interested in the rise of the city in the West. The city provided an alternative to the feudal order and a setting in which modern capitalism and, more generally, rationality could develop. He defined a city as having the following characteristics:

1. It is a relatively closed settlement.
2. It is relatively large.
3. It possesses a marketplace.
4. It has partial political autonomy.

Although many cities in many societies had these characteristics, Western cities developed a peculiarly rational character with, among other things, a rationally organized marketplace and political structure.

Weber looked at various other societies in order to determine why they did not develop the rational form of the city. He concluded that barriers like the traditional

community in China and the caste system in India impeded the rise of such a city. But in the West, a number of rationalizing forces coalesced to create the modern city. For example, the development of a city requires a relatively rational economy. But, of course, the converse is also true: the development of a rational economy requires the modern city.

Art Forms To give a sense of the breadth of Weber's thinking, a few words are needed about his work on the rationalization of various art forms. For example, Weber (1921/1958) viewed music in the West as having developed in a peculiarly rational direction. Musical creativity is reduced to routine procedures based on comprehensive principles. Music in the Western world has undergone a "transformation of the process of musical production into a calculable affair operating with known means, effective instruments, and understandable rules" (Weber, 1921/1958:li). Although the process of rationalization engenders tension in all the institutions in which it occurs, that tension is nowhere more noticeable than in music. After all, music is supposed to be an arena of expressive flexibility, but it is being progressively reduced to a rational, and ultimately mathematical, system.

Weber (1904–1905/1958) sees a similar development in other art forms. For example, in painting, Weber emphasizes "the rational utilization of lines and spatial perspective—which the Renaissance created for us" (1904–1905/1958:15). In architecture, "the rational use of the Gothic vault as a means of distributing pressure and of roofing spaces of all forms, and above all as the constructive principle of great monumental buildings and the foundation of a *style* extending to sculpture and painting, such as that created by our Middle Ages, does not occur elsewhere [in the world]" (Weber, 1904–1905/1958:15).

We have now spent a number of pages examining Weber's ideas on rationalization in various aspects of social life. Although nowhere does Weber explicitly say so, I believe that he adopted the view that changes in the cultural level of rationality are leading to changes in the structures as well as in the individual thoughts and actions of the modern world. The rationalization process is not left to float alone above concrete phenomena but is embedded in various social structures and in the thoughts and actions of individuals. To put it slightly differently, the key point is that the cultural system of rationality occupies a position of causal priority in Weber's work. This can be illustrated in still another way by looking at Weber's work on the relationship between religion and economics—more specifically, the relationship between religion and the development, or lack of development, of a capitalist economy.

Religion and the Rise of Capitalism

Weber spent much of his life studying religion—this in spite of, or perhaps because of, his being areligious, or, as he once described himself, "religiously unmusical" (Gerth and Mills, 1958:25). One of his overriding concerns was the relationship among a variety of the world's religions and the development only in the West of a capitalist economic system (Schlucter, 1996). It is clear that the vast bulk of this work is done at the social-structural and cultural levels; the thoughts and actions of

Calvinists, Buddhists, Confucians, Jews, Muslims (Nafassi, 1998; B. Turner, 1974), and others are held to be affected by changes in social structures and social institutions. Weber was interested primarily in the systems of ideas of the world's religions, in the "spirit" of capitalism, and in rationalization as a modern system of norms and values. He was also very interested in the structures of the world's religions, the various structural components of the societies in which they exist that serve to facilitate or impede rationalization, and the structural aspects of capitalism and the rest of the modern world.

Weber's work on religion and capitalism involved an enormous body of cross-cultural historical research; here, as elsewhere, he did comparative-historical sociology (Kalberg, 1997). Freund (1968:213) summarized the complicated interrelationships involved in this research:

1. Economic forces influenced Protestantism.
2. Economic forces influenced religions other than Protestantism (for example, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Taoism).
3. Religious idea systems influenced individual thoughts and actions—in particular, economic thoughts and actions.
4. Religious idea systems have been influential throughout the world.
5. Religious idea systems (particularly Protestantism) have had the unique effect in the West of helping to rationalize the economic sector and virtually every other institution.

To this we can add:

6. Religious idea systems in the non-Western world have created overwhelming structural barriers to rationalization.

By according the religious factor great importance, Weber appeared to be simultaneously building on and criticizing his image of Marx's work. Weber, like Marx, operated with a complicated model of the interrelationship of primarily large-scale systems: "Weber's sociology is related to Marx's thought in the common attempt to grasp the interrelations of institutional orders making up a social structure: In Weber's work, military and religious, political and juridical institutional systems are functionally related to the economic order in a variety of ways" (Gerth and Mills, 1958:49). In fact, Weber's affinities with Marx are even greater than is often recognized. Although Weber, especially early in his career, gave primacy to religious ideas, he later came to see that material forces, not idea systems, are of greater importance (Kalberg, 1985:61). As Weber said, "Not ideas, but material and ideal interests, directly govern men's conduct. Yet very frequently the 'world images' that have been created by 'ideas' have, like switchmen, determined the tracks along which action has been pushed by the dynamic of interest" (cited in Gerth and Mills, 1958:280).

Paths to Salvation

In analyzing the relationship between the world's religions and the economy, Weber (1921/1963) developed a typology of the paths of salvation. *Asceticism* is the first

broad type of religiosity, and it combines an orientation toward action with the commitment of believers to denying themselves the pleasures of the world. Ascetic religions are divided into two subtypes. *Otherworldly asceticism* involves a set of norms and values that command the followers not to work within the secular world and to fight against its temptations (Kalberg, 2001). Of greater interest to Weber, because it encompasses Calvinism, was *innerworldly asceticism*. Such a religion does not reject the world; instead, it actively urges its members to work within the world so that they can find salvation, or at least signs of it. The distinctive goal here is the strict, methodical control of the members' patterns of life, thought, and action. Members are urged to reject everything unethical, esthetic, or dependent on their emotional reactions to the secular world. Innerworldly ascetics are motivated to systematize their own conduct.

Whereas both types of asceticism involve some type of action and self-denial, *mysticism* involves contemplation, emotion, and inaction. Weber subdivided mysticism in the same way as asceticism. *World-rejecting mysticism* involves total flight from the world. *Innerworldly mysticism* leads to contemplative efforts to understand the meaning of the world, but these efforts are doomed to failure, because the world is viewed as being beyond individual comprehension. In any case, both types of mysticism and world-rejecting asceticism can be seen as idea systems that inhibit the development of capitalism and rationality. In contrast, innerworldly asceticism is the system of norms and values that contributed to the development of these phenomena in the West.

The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism In Max Weber's best-known work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905/1958), he traced the impact of ascetic Protestantism—primarily Calvinism—on the rise of the spirit of capitalism (Breiner, 2005; H. Jones, 1997). This work is but a small part of a larger body of scholarship that traces the relationship between religion and modern capitalism throughout much of the world.

Weber, especially later in his work, made it clear that his most general interest was in the rise of the distinctive rationality of the West. Capitalism, with its rational organization of free labor, its open market, and its rational bookkeeping system, is only one component of that developing system. He directly linked it to the parallel development of rationalized science, law, politics, art, architecture, literature, universities, and the polity.

Weber did not directly link the idea system of the Protestant ethic to the structures of the capitalist system; instead, he was content to link the Protestant ethic to another system of ideas, the “spirit of capitalism.” In other words, two systems of ideas are directly linked in this work. Although links of the capitalist economic system to the material world are certainly implied and indicated, they were not Weber's primary concern. Thus, *The Protestant Ethic* is not about the rise of modern capitalism but is about the origin of a peculiar spirit that eventually made modern rational capitalism (some form of capitalism had existed since early times) expand and come to dominate the economy.

Weber began by examining and rejecting alternative explanations of why capitalism arose in the West in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (for an alternative

view on this, see R. Collins, 1997a). To those who contended that capitalism arose because the material conditions were right at that time, Weber retorted that material conditions were also ripe at other times and capitalism did not arise. Weber also rejected the psychological theory that the development of capitalism was due simply to the acquisitive instinct. In his view, such an instinct always has existed, yet it did not produce capitalism in other situations.

Evidence for Weber's views on the significance of Protestantism was found in an examination of countries with mixed religious systems. In looking at these countries, he discovered that the leaders of the economic system—business leaders, owners of capital, high-grade skilled labor, and more advanced technically and commercially trained personnel—were all overwhelmingly Protestant. This suggested that Protestantism was a significant cause in the choice of these occupations and, conversely, that other religions (for example, Roman Catholicism) failed to produce idea systems that impelled individuals into these vocations.

In Weber's view, the spirit of capitalism is not defined simply by economic greed; it is in many ways the exact opposite. It is a moral and ethical system, an ethos, that among other things stresses economic success. In fact, it was the turning of profit making into an ethos that was critical in the West. In other societies, the pursuit of profit was seen as an individual act motivated at least in part by greed. Thus it was viewed by many as morally suspect. However, Protestantism succeeded in turning the pursuit of profit into a moral crusade. It was the backing of the moral system that led to the unprecedented expansion of profit seeking and, ultimately, to the capitalist system. On a theoretical level, by stressing that he was dealing with the relationship between one ethos (Protestantism) and another (the spirit of capitalism), Weber was able to keep his analysis primarily at the level of systems of ideas.

The spirit of capitalism can be seen as a normative system that involves a number of interrelated ideas. For example, its goal is to instill an "attitude which seeks profit rationally and systematically" (Weber, 1904–1905/1958:64). In addition, it preaches an avoidance of life's pleasures: "Seest thou a man diligent in business? He shall stand before kings" (Weber, 1904–1905/1958:53). Also included in the spirit of capitalism are ideas such as "time is money," "be industrious," "be frugal," "be punctual," "be fair," and "earning money is a legitimate end in itself." Above all, there is the idea that it is people's duty to increase their wealth ceaselessly. This takes the spirit of capitalism out of the realm of individual ambition and into the category of an ethical imperative. Although Weber admitted that a type of capitalism (for example, adventurer capitalism) existed in China, India, Babylon, and the classical world and during the Middle Ages, it was different from Western capitalism, primarily because it lacked "this particular ethos" (1904–1905/1958:52).

Weber was interested not simply in describing this ethical system but also in explaining its derivations. He thought that Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, was crucial to the rise of the spirit of capitalism. Calvinism is no longer necessary to the continuation of that economic system. In fact, in many senses modern capitalism, given its secularity, stands in opposition to Calvinism and to religion in general. Capitalism today has become a real entity that combines norms, values, market,

money, and laws. It has become, in Durkheim's terms, a social fact that is external to, and coercive of, the individual. As Weber put it:

Capitalism is today an immense cosmos into which the individual is born, and which presents itself to him, at least as an individual, as an unalterable order of things in which he must live. It forces the individual, in so far as he is involved in the system of market relationships, to conform to capitalist rules of action.

(Weber, 1904–1905/1958:54)

Another crucial point here is that Calvinists did not consciously seek to create a capitalist system. In Weber's view, capitalism was an *unanticipated consequence* (Cherkaoui, 2007) of the Protestant ethic. The concept of unanticipated consequences has broad significance in Weber's work, for he believed that what individuals and groups intend by their actions often leads to a set of consequences that are at variance with their intentions. Although Weber did not explain this point, it seems that it is related to his theoretical view that people create social structures but those structures soon take on a life of their own, over which the creators have little or no control. Because people lack control over them, structures are free to develop in a variety of totally unanticipated directions. Weber's line of thinking led Arthur Mitzman (1970) to argue that Weber created a sociology of reification. Reified social structures are free to move in unanticipated directions, as both Marx and Weber showed in their analyses of capitalism.

Calvinism and the Spirit of Capitalism Calvinism was the version of Protestantism that interested Weber most. One feature of Calvinism was the idea that only a small number of people are chosen for salvation. In addition, Calvinism entailed the idea of predestination; people were predestined to be either among the saved or among the damned. There was nothing that the individual or the religion as a whole could do to affect that fate. Yet the idea of predestination left people uncertain about whether they were among the saved. To reduce this uncertainty, the Calvinists developed the idea that *signs* could be used as indicators of whether a person was saved. People were urged to work hard, because if they were diligent, they would uncover the signs of salvation, which were to be found in economic success. In sum, the Calvinist was urged to engage in intense, worldly activity and to become a "man of vocation."

However, isolated actions were not enough. Calvinism, as an ethic, required self-control and a systematized style of life that involved an integrated round of activities, particularly business activities. This stood in contrast to the Christian ideal of the Middle Ages, in which individuals simply engaged in isolated acts as the occasion arose in order to atone for particular sins and to increase their chances of salvation. "The God of Calvinism demanded of his believers not single good works, but a life of good works combined into a unified system" (Weber, 1904–1905/1958:117). Calvinism produced an ethical system and ultimately a group of people who were nascent capitalists. Calvinism "has the highest ethical appreciation of the sober, middle-class, self-made man" (Weber, 1904–1905/1958:163). Weber neatly summarized his own position on Calvinism and its relationship to capitalism as follows:

The religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means of asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of . . . the spirit of capitalism.

(Weber, 1904–1905/1958:172)

In addition to its general link to the spirit of capitalism, Calvinism had some more specific links. First, as already mentioned, capitalists could ruthlessly pursue their economic interests and feel that such pursuit was not merely self-interest but was, in fact, their ethical duty. This not only permitted unprecedented mercilessness in business but also silenced potential critics, who could not simply reduce these actions to self-interest. Second, Calvinism provided the rising capitalist “with sober, conscientious and unusually industrious workmen who clung to their work as to a life purpose willed by god” (Weber, 1904–1905/1958:117). With such a workforce, the nascent capitalist could raise the level of exploitation to unprecedented heights. Third, Calvinism legitimized an unequal stratification system by giving the capitalist the “comforting assurances that the unequal distribution of the goods of this world was a special dispensation of Divine Providence” (Weber, 1904–1905/1958:117).

Weber also had reservations about the capitalist system, as he did about all aspects of the rationalized world. For example, he pointed out that capitalism tends to produce “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved” (Weber, 1904–1905/1958:182).

Although in *The Protestant Ethic* Weber focused on the effect of Calvinism on the spirit of capitalism, he was well aware that social and economic conditions have a reciprocal impact on religion. He chose not to deal with such relationships in this book, but he made it clear that his goal was not to substitute a one-sided spiritualist interpretation for the one-sided materialist explanation that he attributed to Marxists. (The same is true of much of the rest of his work, including his essays on the Russian Revolution; see Wells and Baehr, 1995:22.) As Kalberg (1996) has pointed out, *The Protestant Ethic* raises a wide number of issues that go to the heart of contemporary sociological theory.

If Calvinism was one of the causal factors in the rise of capitalism in the West, then the question arises: Why didn't capitalism arise in other societies? In his effort to answer this question, Weber dealt with spiritual and material barriers to the rise of capitalism. Let us look briefly at Weber's analysis of those barriers in two societies—China and India.

Religion and Capitalism in China

One crucial assumption that allowed Weber to make legitimate the comparison between the West and China is that both had the prerequisites for the development of capitalism. In China, there was a tradition of intense acquisitiveness and unscrupulous competition. There was great industry and an enormous capacity for work in the populace. Powerful guilds existed. The population was expanding. And there was a steady growth in precious metals. With these and other material prerequisites, why didn't

capitalism arise in China? As has been pointed out before, Weber's general answer was that social, structural, and religious barriers in China prevented the development of capitalism. This is not to say that capitalism was entirely absent in China (Love, 2000). There were moneylenders and purveyors who sought high rates of profit. But a market, as well as various other components of a rational capitalistic system, was absent. In Weber's view, the rudimentary capitalism of China "pointed in a direction opposite to the development of rational economic corporate enterprises" (1916/1964:86).

Structural Barriers Weber listed several structural barriers to the rise of capitalism in China. First, there was the structure of the typical Chinese community. It was held together by rigid kinship bonds in the form of sibs. The sibs were ruled by elders, who made them bastions of traditionalism. The sibs were self-contained entities, and there was little dealing with other sibs. This encouraged small, encapsulated landholdings and a household-based, rather than a market, economy. The extensive partitioning of the land prevented major technological developments, because economies of scale were impossible. Agricultural production remained in the hands of peasants, industrial production in the hands of small-scale artisans. Modern cities, which were to become the centers of Western capitalism, were inhibited in their development because the people retained their allegiance to the sibs. Because of the sibs' autonomy, the central government was never able to govern these units effectively or to mold them into a unified whole.

The structure of the Chinese state was a second barrier to the rise of capitalism. The state was largely patrimonial and governed by tradition, prerogative, and favoritism. In Weber's view, a rational and calculable system of administration and law enforcement, which was necessary for industrial development, did not exist. There were very few formal laws covering commerce, there was no central court, and legal formalism was rejected. This irrational type of administrative structure was a barrier to the rise of capitalism, as Weber made clear: "Capital investment in industry is far too sensitive to such irrational rule and too dependent upon the possibility of calculating the steady and rational operation of the state machinery to emerge within an administration of this type" (1916/1964:103). In addition to its general structure, a number of more specific components of the state acted against the development of capitalism. For example, the officials of the bureaucratic administration had vested material interests that made them oppose capitalism. Officials often bought offices primarily to make a profit, and this kind of orientation did not necessarily make for a high degree of efficiency.

A third structural barrier to the rise of capitalism was the nature of the Chinese language. In Weber's view, it militated against rationality by making systematic thought difficult. It remained largely in the realm of the "pictorial" and the "descriptive." Logical thinking was also inhibited because intellectual thought remained largely in the form of parables, and this hardly was the basis for the development of a cumulative body of knowledge.

Although there were other structural barriers to the rise of capitalism (for example, a country without wars or overseas trade), a key factor was the lack of the

required “mentality,” the lack of the needed idea system. Weber looked at the two dominant systems of religious ideas in China—Confucianism and Taoism—and the characteristics of both that militated against the development of a spirit of capitalism.

Confucianism A central characteristic of Confucian thinking was its emphasis on a literary education as a prerequisite for office and for social status. To acquire a position in the ruling strata, a person had to be a member of the literati. Movement up the hierarchy was based on a system of ideas that tested literary knowledge, not the technical knowledge needed to conduct the office in question. What was valued and tested was whether the individual’s mind was steeped in culture and whether it was characterized by ways of thought suitable to a cultured man. In Weber’s terms, Confucianism encouraged “a highly bookish literary education.” The literati produced by this system came to see the actual work of administration as beneath them, mere tasks to be delegated to subordinates. Instead, the literati aspired to clever puns, euphemisms, and allusions to classical quotations—a purely literary kind of intellectuality. With this kind of orientation, it is easy to see why the literati were unconcerned with the state of the economy or with economic activities. The worldview of the Confucians ultimately grew to be the policy of the state. As a result, the Chinese state came to be only minimally involved in rationally influencing the economy and the rest of society. The Confucians maintained their influence by having the constitution decree that only they could serve as officials, and competitors to Confucians (for example, the bourgeoisie, prophets, and priests) were blocked from serving in the government. In fact, if the emperor dared to deviate from this rule, he was thought to be toying with disaster and his potential downfall.

Many other components of Confucianism militated against capitalism. It was basically an ethic of adjustment to the world and to its order and its conventions. Rather than viewing material success and wealth as a sign of salvation as the Calvinist did, the Confucian simply was led to accept things as they were. In fact, there was no idea of salvation in Confucianism, and this lack of tension between religion and the world also acted to inhibit the rise of capitalism. The snobbish Confucian was urged to reject thrift, because it was something that commoners practiced. In contrast to the Puritan work ethic, it was not regarded as proper for a Confucian gentleman to work, although wealth was prized. Active engagement in a profitable enterprise was regarded as morally dubious and unbecoming to a Confucian’s station. The acceptable goal for such a gentleman was a good position, not high profits. The ethic emphasized the abilities of a gentleman rather than the highly specialized skills that could have proved useful to a developing capitalist system. In sum, Weber contended that Confucianism became a relentless canonization of tradition.

Taoism Weber perceived Taoism as a mystical Chinese religion in which the supreme good was deemed to be a psychic state, a state of mind, and not a state of grace to be obtained by conduct in the real world. As a result, Taoists did not operate in a rational way to affect the external world. Taoism was essentially traditional, and one of its basic tenets was “Do not introduce innovations” (Weber, 1916/1964:203). Such

an idea system was unlikely to produce any major changes, let alone one as far-reaching as capitalism.

One trait common to Taoism and Confucianism is that neither produced enough tension, or conflict, among the members to motivate them to much innovative action in this world:

Neither in its official state cult nor in its Taoist aspect could Chinese religiosity produce sufficiently strong motives for a religiously oriented life for the individual such as the Puritan method represents. Both forms of religion lacked even the traces of the Satanic force or evil against which [the] pious Chinese might have struggled for his salvation.

(Weber, 1916/1964:206)

As was true of Confucianism, there was no inherent force in Taoism to impel actors to change the world or, more specifically, to build a capitalist system.

Religion and Capitalism in India

For our purposes, a very brief discussion of Weber's (1916–1917/1958) thinking on the relationship between religion and capitalism in India will suffice. The argument, though not its details, parallels the Chinese case. For example, Weber discussed the structural barriers of the caste system (Gellner, 1982:534). Among other things, the caste system erected overwhelming barriers to social mobility, and it tended to regulate even the most minute aspects of people's lives. The idea system of the Brahmins had a number of components. For example, Brahmins were expected to avoid vulgar occupations and to observe elegance in manners and proprieties in conduct. Indifference to the world's mundane affairs was the crowning idea of Brahmin religiosity. The Brahmins also emphasized a highly literary kind of education. Although there certainly were important differences between Brahmins and Confucians, the ethos of each presented overwhelming barriers to the rise of capitalism.

The Hindu religion posed similar ideational barriers. Its key idea was reincarnation. To the Hindu, a person is born into the caste that he or she deserves by virtue of behavior in a past life. Through faithful adherence to the ritual of caste, the Hindu gains merit for the next life. Hinduism, unlike Calvinism, was traditional in the sense that salvation was to be achieved by faithfully following the rules; innovation, particularly in the economic sphere, could not lead to a higher caste in the next life. Activity in this world was not important, because the world was seen as a transient abode and an impediment to the spiritual quest. In these and other ways, the idea system associated with Hinduism failed to produce the kind of people who could create a capitalist economic system and, more generally, a rationally ordered society.

Criticisms

There have been numerous criticisms of Weber. We will examine four of the most important. The first criticism has to do with Weber's *verstehen* method. Weber was caught between two problems in regards to *verstehen*. On the one hand, it could not

simply mean a subjective intuition because this would not be scientific. On the other hand, the sociologist could not just proclaim the “objective” meaning of the social phenomenon. Weber declared that his method fell between these two choices, but he never fully explained how (Herva, 1988). The deficiencies in his methodology are not always apparent from reading of Weber’s insightful analysis based on his own interpretations. But they become perfectly clear when sociologists try to apply his method to their own research or, even more so, when they attempt to teach *verstehen* to others. Clearly, the method involves systemic and rigorous research, but the magic of turning that research into Weber’s illuminating insights eludes us. This has led some (Abel, 1948) to relegate *verstehen* to a heuristic operation of discovery that precedes the real scientific work of sociology. Others have suggested that *verstehen* needs to be seen as itself a social process and that our understanding of others always proceeds out of a dialogue (Shields, 1996).

The second criticism is that Weber lacks a fully theorized macrosociology. We have already spent some time exploring the contradiction between Weber’s individualistic method and his focus on large-scale social structures and world-historical norms. In Weber’s method, class is reduced to a collection of people in the same economic situation. Political structure is reduced to the acceptance of domination because of subjectively perceived legitimacy in terms of rationality, charisma, or traditions. Weber certainly recognizes that class and political structures have effects on people—not to mention such macrophenomena as religion and rationalization—but he has no way to theorize these effects except as a collection of unintended consequences. He has no theory of how these work as systems behind the back of individuals and, in some cases, even to determine the intention of actors (B. Turner, 1981).

The third criticism of Weber is that he lacks a critical theory. In other words, others have said that Weber’s theory cannot be used to point out opportunities for constructive change. This criticism can be demonstrated through examining Weber’s theory of rationalization.

Weber used the term *rationalization* in a number of ways, but he was primarily concerned with two types. One concerns the development of bureaucracy and its legal form of authority (see pp. 130–131). The other refers to the subjective changes in attitude that he called formal rationality (see pp. 137–138). In the confluence of bureaucracy and formal rationality we see what Weber described as unintended consequences. The creation of bureaucracy and the adaptation of formal rationality end up undermining the very purposes that the rationalization was meant to serve. This is what I have called the irrational consequences of rationality. Weber’s famous iron cage is one of these irrational consequences. Bureaucracy and formal rationality were initially developed because of their efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control in achieving a given goal (for example, to help the poor). But as rationalization proceeds, the original goal tends to be forgotten, and the organization increasingly devotes itself to efficiency, predictability, calculability, and control for their own sakes. For example, welfare bureaucracies measure their success by their efficiency in “dealing” with clients, even their efficiency in getting them off welfare, regardless of whether doing so actually serves the original goal of helping the poor to better their situations.

In some of his most-quoted passages, Weber implies that this process is inevitable, as for example in his metaphor of the iron cage. However, as argued above, it would be wrong to see this as a general evolutionary sequence of inevitable rationalization. Johannes Weiss (1987) maintains that rationalization is inevitable only to the extent that we want it to be so. It is simply that our world is so complex that it is difficult to conceive of accomplishing any significant task without the efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control of rationalization—even if it inevitably ends in its own peculiar irrationality. We may dream of a world without bureaucracies, but “the real question is whether—with due regard to the obligations of intellectual honesty—we seriously strive to attain it or ever could” (Weiss, 1987:162).

Many people prefer to ignore their own complicity and to see rationalization as something that is imposed on them. Indeed, one of the most cited criticisms of Weber is that he did not provide a strategy for opposing this rationalization (Marcuse, 1971). Since I work in a bureaucracy (a university), deal with them everyday, and will complain when they are not efficient or predictable enough, I am not in a position to make such a strong criticism of Weber. Nevertheless, part of the reason for our complicity is the lack of fully developed alternatives to an increasingly bureaucratized world. Consequently, it is quite fair to criticize Weber for not offering such an alternative, and it is right for those who follow Weber to work at providing a theory of an alternative.

The final criticism is of the unremitting pessimism of Weber’s sociology. We can see from Weber’s sociological method that he firmly believed in the centrality of individual meaning; however, his substantive work on rationalization and domination indicated that we are trapped in an increasingly meaningless and disenchanting world. It could be said that anyone who still feels optimistic about our culture after reading the closing pages of *The Protestant Ethic* simply hasn’t understood them. This alone is not a criticism of Weber. It is shortsighted to criticize someone who points out your cage, if in fact you are in one. Nevertheless, not only did Weber not attempt to provide us with alternatives, he seems to have missed the fact that some of the unintended consequences may be beneficial.

Summary

Max Weber has had a more powerful positive impact on a wide range of sociological theories than any other sociological theorist. This influence is traceable to the sophistication, complexity, and sometimes even confusion of Weberian theory. Despite its problems, Weber’s work represents a remarkable fusion of historical research and sociological theorizing.

This chapter opens with a discussion of the theoretical roots and methodological orientations of Weberian theory. Weber, over the course of his career, moved progressively toward a fusion of history and sociology, that is, toward the development of a historical sociology. One of his most critical methodological concepts is *verstehen*. Although this is often interpreted as a tool to be used to analyze individual consciousness, in Weber’s hands it was more often a scientific tool to analyze structural and

institutional constraints on actors. Other aspects of Weber's methodology, including his propensity to think in terms of causality and to employ ideal types, are discussed. In addition, I examine his analysis of the relationship between values and sociology.

The heart of Weberian sociology lies in substantive sociology, not in methodological statements. Although Weber based his theories on his thoughts about social action and social relationships, his main interest was the large-scale structures and institutions of society. I examine especially his analysis of the three structures of authority—rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic. In the context of rational-legal authority, I deal with his famous ideal-typical bureaucracy and show how he used that tool to analyze traditional and charismatic authority. Of particular interest is Weber's work on charisma. Not only did he have a clear sense of it as a structure of authority, he was also interested in the processes by which such a structure is produced.

Although his work on social structures—such as authority—is important, it is at the cultural level, in his work on the rationalization of the world, that Weber's most important insights lie. Weber articulated the idea that the world is becoming increasingly dominated by norms and values of rationalization. In this context, I discuss Weber's work on the economy, religion, law, the polity, the city, and art forms. Weber argued that rationalization was sweeping across all these institutions in the West, whereas there were major barriers to this process in the rest of the world.

Weber's thoughts on rationalization and various other issues are illustrated in his work on the relationship between religion and capitalism. At one level, this is a series of studies of the relationship between ideas (religious ideas) and the development of the spirit of capitalism and, ultimately, capitalism itself. At another level, it is a study of how the West developed a distinctively rational religious system (Calvinism) that played a key role in the rise of a rational economic system (capitalism). Weber also studied other societies, in which he found religious systems (for example, Confucianism, Taoism, and Hinduism) that inhibit the growth of a rational economic system. It is this kind of majestic sweep over the history of many sectors of the world that helps give Weberian theory its enduring significance.