

Chapter 2

Classical Stage European Sources of Sociological Theory

From the very beginning people have always been immersed in their social worlds and have influenced one another, both intentionally and unintentionally, in various ways, positive and negative. Their relationships, whether cooperative or competitive, long-term or short-term, have always involved common sense theoretical assumptions regarding why different people behave as they do and how they should adapt to one another or organize themselves for some common purpose. This applies to face-to-face relationships as well as larger social systems. Many of these implicit assumptions and beliefs, which may vary greatly in different societies or different groups within a society, tend to be passed along from generation to generation as parents socialize their children.

Although people have always speculated and theorized about human beings' behavior and the organization of their society, the scientific approach to social life as we understand it today did not develop until just a few hundred years ago. This chapter reviews this development briefly as a foundation for the more detailed discussion of contemporary theories in subsequent chapters. The general topics to be covered in this chapter include the following:

- Social and intellectual background—This section will highlight the growth of science and the transformation from traditional to modern society as helping stimulate the development of sociology. The contributions of Auguste Comte will be described briefly, plus the transition from the eighteenth century faith in reason to the nineteenth century rediscovery of the persistence of nonrational features of social life.
- Major European founders—This section will provide a highly selective review of the key contributions of Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel to modern sociology.
- Other important classical-stage theorists—In this section, the contributions of several additional pioneering theorists will be highlighted, including Harriet Martineau, Alexis de Tocqueville, Vilfredo Pareto, Ferdinand Tönnies, and Marianna Weber.

Social and Intellectual Background

Auguste Comte has sometimes been called the “father of sociology,” but the scientific approach he advocated was foreshadowed 500 years earlier by Ibn Khaldun, a solitary intellectual of the fourteenth century Arab world (see Chambliss, 1954:285–312). Khaldun’s goal was to explain the historical process of the rise and fall of civilizations in terms of a pattern of recurring conflicts between tough nomadic desert tribes and sedentary-type societies with their love of luxuries and pleasure. He believed that the advanced civilizations that develop in densely settled communities are accompanied by a more centralized political authority system and by the gradual erosion of social cohesion within the population. As a result such societies become vulnerable to conquest by tough and highly disciplined nomadic peoples from the unsettled desert. Eventually, however, the hardy conquerors succumb to the temptations of the soft and refined lifestyle of the people they had conquered, and so the cycle is eventually repeated. Although this cyclical theory was based on Khaldun’s observations of social trends in the Arabian desert, his goal was to develop a **general** model of the dynamics of society and the process of large-scale social change. His insights were neglected by European and American social theorists, however, perhaps partly because of the growing dominance of Western Europe over the Arab world in succeeding centuries.

A full understanding of why sociology emerged when it did would require detailed consideration of the convergence of the material, social, and intellectual transformations that had been occurring since before the eighteenth century. But it was Auguste Comte, writing in the first half of the nineteenth century, who coined the term “sociology” and whose ideas helped lay the foundation for the modern concept of sociology as a science.¹ In contrast to Khaldun’s cyclical theory, Comte’s (1858) model of long-range historical change was linear and reflected his goal of explaining both social stability and progress. His concept of sociology as the scientific study of the social world influenced Émile Durkheim half a century later and is still a basic tenet of the sociological perspective.

¹Comte’s first and major work, entitled *The Course of Positive Philosophy* and published between 1830 and 1842, set forth a vision for sociology that would not only explain the whole course of human beings’ social and intellectual history but also provide a scientific basis for social reorganization. A summary of Comte’s contributions to the establishment of sociology was previously published in Johnson ([1981] 1986:71–89). The first chapter of Lewis Coser’s *Masters of Sociological Thought* (Coser, 1977:3–41) is devoted to Auguste Comte and provides a succinct overview of his major contributions, biographical details of his life, and background information regarding the social and intellectual context. Coser’s book provides similar information for several other figures who are important for the development of sociology. See also Turner et al. (2002:7–33) for a additional information regarding Comte’s major contributions and intellectual context.

Science, Social Evolution, and the Dream of a More Rational Society

The growth of the scientific mentality was a major stimulus for the birth of sociology. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, the scientific method had already made great advances in the physical sciences. In physics and astronomy it had been established that uniformities in the movements of physical objects, such as planets and falling rocks, could be explained by natural laws that could be discovered through scientific investigation. In biology much attention was given to classifying different species but a major breakthrough occurred with the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution. By this time the notion of a long-term evolutionary process had already been used by numerous social theorists to try to explain the development of modern societies. Many of the new scientific discoveries led to conflict with traditional religious teachings, however, and many early social theorists believed that the influence of traditional religious teachings and practices would decline as scientific knowledge advanced.

The technological developments stimulated by the growth in scientific knowledge helped reinforce the validity of the scientific method. The employment of new production technologies in the emerging factory system and widespread migrations from rural to urban areas represented social changes leading to new kinds of socioeconomic class relations, new forms of exploitation, and numerous social problems. The goal of developing sociology as a scientific discipline resulted in large part from various efforts to understand these long-range and pervasive social transformations. The challenge was to explain the implications of the long-term transition from a rural and village-based agricultural society to an increasingly urban industrial social order. Of course, the stability and tranquility of traditional societies was sometimes overestimated. Nevertheless, it was the idealized image of the past that provided a basis of comparison with the strains and transformations of the unsettled and uncertain present. Despite the variations in different countries and at different times, all of the pioneering sociological theorists included an implicit (or explicit) dichotomy contrasting traditional with modern forms of society, plus models for explaining the transition from the former to the latter.

In addition to these internal transformations, Europeans had long been absorbing stories of social life and customs of people in nonindustrial or "pre-modern" societies in far-off places that had been brought back by traders, missionaries, and adventurers. To be sure, these contacts often involved efforts to dominate, colonize, and convert them. Nevertheless, this expanded knowledge led to speculation about cultural variations and about how societies might have evolved from pre-industrial and "primitive" forms to more advanced, complex, and urban-industrial types.

Most of the early sociologists dealt with the process of social evolution in various ways. One of the most notable was the British social theorist Herbert

Spencer.² He developed an elaborate theory of how societies had evolved over the centuries from simple, small-scale systems to complex, large-scale systems as a result of people's ongoing efforts to improve their overall well-being. This perspective has typically been regarded as highly individualistic. However, Spencer also noted that advances in moral sentiments accompanied the increased size and complexity of social systems. Given the importance of this evolutionary process in insuring social progress, it was important not to interfere with it, such as through excessive government regulation and control, for example. Of course, he regarded Great Britain (or modern European societies in general) as the most advanced in this long evolutionary process. This belief in evolutionary progress became highly influential in both England and America and influenced greatly the early development of American sociology.

In retrospect, we now understand that such ethnocentric attitudes of cultural superiority helped justify Western European colonialism. Despite Spencer's distrust of government interference in the natural evolutionary process, early social theorists recognized the increasing importance of the nation-state, particularly in international affairs but also in promoting internal social order. Colonial exploits were a major source of the material resources needed by developing nation-states to strengthen their control and expand international trade. As nation-states became stronger, the power and autonomy of local communities, villages, families, and other smaller-scale social units decreased. Combined with the changes brought about by increased mobility and urbanization, it seemed clear that traditional, localized small-scale social structures were being overshadowed by the expansion of larger-scale and more complex social structures, particularly nation-states.

Another important development that helped explain the nineteenth century rise of sociology as a scientific discipline was a wide-spread loss of faith in the optimistic eighteenth century "Enlightenment" belief in the power of reason to insure social progress through rational reorganization of society. This faith in the possibility of using reason to reorganize society had helped foster the critical social thought that led eventually to the French Revolution. Even the opening lines of our own Declaration of Independence ("We hold these truths to be self-evident...") reflect a faith in the ability to discover "self-evident" truths through the power of reason.

²Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) worked as a civil engineer in his early years but his father and grandfather were both teachers. His initial writings were as a journalist who was a strong advocate for individual rights. As he developed his expanding views, the books he wrote applied his general evolutionary perspective to human intelligence as well as the increasing size and complexity of social systems. Although he has not part of the academic establishment, his writings eventually became influential among leading intellectuals. His evolutionary perspective on societies as social systems was long considered crucial for the establishment of sociology as an academic discipline (Spencer, 1967). See Turner (1985) for a detailed summary of Spencer's theoretical perspective and Turner et al. (2002:43–101) and Coser (1977:88–127) for succinct overviews of Spencer's contributions and intellectual context.

We should remember in this context that the French Revolution, which was intended to establish a more rational society, occurred less than two decades after the American revolution. However, the strong faith in reason as the main source of knowledge of universal natural laws was severely shaken by the tumultuous social and political events of the nineteenth century. Thus the emergence of sociology occurred at a time when many intellectuals were becoming acutely aware of the persistence of the nonrational foundations of people's behavior and the traditions that help maintain social order.

Confronting the Nonrational Dimensions of Social Life

The establishment of sociology may perhaps be seen in part as a result of a struggle to understand, within a rational scientific perspective, the nonrational (or irrational) aspects of human behavior and of society itself. Auguste Comte's "positivist" approach to understanding society reveals this dilemma between reason and the nonrational. His pioneering theoretical perspective (which reflected the ideas of his one-time mentor, Henri St. Simon) involved the argument that the entire scope of human beings' intellectual history, and each of the various sciences in particular (physical and biological as well as social), had gone through three great stages—the "theological, the metaphysical, and the positive." Each stage had made an important contribution to progress, but was destined to be replaced by the next stage over the long course of human evolution. Since sociology was the last of the various sciences to reach the final "positive" stage, its "data" would include the advanced knowledge already acquired in all of the other sciences. This means that sociology would be able to provide the most comprehensive explanation of the scientific laws governing intellectual and social progress. Once discovered, these laws could (and should) be used as a basis for "positive" social reorganization (Coser, 1977:3–41; Johnson [1981] 1986:41–89).

Living some decades after the turbulence of the French Revolution, Comte was highly skeptical regarding eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophers' rationalistic faith and criticized their utopian (or "metaphysical") ideas for reorganizing society on the basis of reason alone. He believed that it was now time to move beyond this "metaphysical" stage and into the "positive" stage. Positivism would lead to an expansion of knowledge through empirical research rather than rational analysis alone, but it would also acknowledge that absolute truth or total knowledge is forever beyond human reach. At the same time, rather than disparage traditional beliefs as irrational (as Comte believed the eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophers had done), the positive approach would discover through scientific investigation the importance that particular traditions had played in the long course of social evolution, even though based on pre-scientific beliefs.

This "positive" approach would enable us to understand social order as well as the stages of progress in society. Social reform efforts must always work within the constraints of the currently existing beliefs and traditions as discovered through

empirical investigation. Otherwise, these efforts run the risk of undermining social order instead of promoting progress. Despite his emphasis on systematic empirical research, Comte's own analysis was quite general and highly speculative and would not conform to contemporary standards of rigorous empirical research.

Comte later offered a rather elaborate social reorganization project of his own that he believed was consistent with the positivist approach. Briefly, his "research" convinced him that religion had played a major role in the past in promoting social solidarity, especially in the long "theological" stage of history. However, as the new age of positivism replaced religion, Comte feared that selfish individualism would increase as the moral codes previously promoted by religious beliefs were undermined. So, faced with the challenge of promoting altruism and social solidarity in the new positivist society of the future, Comte proposed a new religion—the religion of humanity (Comte, 1877). Sociologists would serve as the moral guardians of this new society, educating people regarding the need to conform to the requirements of the social order.

Comte's skepticism regarding the power of rational analysis to shape people's motivations, or to serve as the basis for a more enlightened social order, was widespread among nineteenth century intellectuals and is revealed in several of the classical stage sociological theories to be reviewed in this chapter. For example, the limitations of reason are reflected in Émile Durkheim's theory of the collective consciousness (or conscience) in which moral values are reinforced more through collective rituals than rational analysis. It is also reflected in Karl Marx's analysis of the "false consciousness" that he believed to be widespread in the working class and in Vilfredo Pareto's view that underlying sentiments are more important in motivating human behavior than the intellectual justifications people might offer to explain it. Max Weber emphasized the growth of rationality in modern society, but he painted a rather bleak picture of the stifling effects of highly rational forms of social organization in addition to emphasizing tradition and the emotional appeal of charismatic leaders.³

These considerations suggest that a scientific understanding of society must confront the nonrational foundations of people's behavior and society's traditions and the role these play in supporting the moral ideals underlying the social order.

³Of these early sociologists, the influence of Durkheim, Marx, and Weber are foundational for contemporary theory, as will be seen later in this chapter. Pareto's ideas will not be a major focus in this book, except as reflected in Parsons' early voluntaristic theory of social action. Freud's ideas will not be discussed in detail; however, it should be noted that Parsons incorporated certain aspects of Freud's theories regarding socialization in the development of his functional theory. Also, Norbert Elias (2000) used Freud's ideas in his analysis of the effects of the long-term historical "civilizing process" on individuals' personality formation. Elias's contributions to contemporary theory will be reviewed in Chapter 19.

Dominant Figures in the Establishment of Sociology

*Émile Durkheim: Sociology as the Science of Social Integration*⁴

Although Comte coined the term **sociology**, Émile Durkheim should be credited for getting it recognized as an academic discipline.⁵ His style of analysis is closer to modern sociology than Comte's wide-ranging speculations. For example, he pioneered in the use of statistical methods to show that variations in suicide rates could be related to variations in the level of social integration (Durkheim [1897] 1966). Later in his career he also used qualitative ethnographic material in his analysis of how religious beliefs and rituals reinforce social bonds and moral solidarity in a pre-modern type of society (Durkheim [1915] 1965). Durkheim contrasted his emphasis on social facts with the highly individualistic evolutionary perspective developed earlier by British social theorist Herbert Spencer as briefly reviewed earlier. Instead of explaining the dynamics of society and social evolution in terms of individuals' previously existing self-interests, Durkheim emphasized that the formation of individuals and their interests is dependent on a pre-existing society. This means that society comes first, not individuals.

Durkheim ([1895] 1964) insisted that sociology as a discipline must focus on social facts, not psychological, biological, or other types of facts. Social facts are external to individuals, exert constraint over them, and are general throughout a society. Social integration is one of the principal social facts that he sought to explain by showing how its form and strength can be documented through specific empirical indicators that can be related to other social facts. The concept of social integration includes specific social attachments among individuals as well as the degree to which they share common sentiments and beliefs—or "collective consciousness". Both suicide rates and religious beliefs and practices also qualify as social facts in his terms, and both can be shown to be related to the level of social

⁴This brief description of Durkheim's contributions is adapted from a more extended overview in D. P. Johnson ([1981] 1986:160–201). See also Coser (1977:129–174) and Turner et al. (2002:307–378) for excellent summaries of Durkheim's contributions to contemporary sociology and his intellectual context, plus Steven Lukes (1973) for a thorough analysis of Durkheim's theoretical perspective.

⁵Durkheim was born in 1858 in a small Jewish enclave in France and died in 1917. His position at the University of Bordeaux in 1887 in pedagogy and social science reflected the first academic recognition of social science in the French university system. When he was promoted to full professor the name of his professorship was changed to science of education and sociology. Two years following his promotion Durkheim established the first scholarly journal devoted to sociology, *L'Année Sociologique*.

integration in society.⁶ Suicide rates tend to be lower in societies with optimal levels of social integration—neither too little nor too much. The data he analyzed showed that both single people and Protestants had higher suicide rates than married persons or Catholics, respectively, because in his view their level of social integration, was lower, as measured by their specific social attachments. Similarly, if the level of common sentiments and beliefs (or “collective consciousness”) is low, the result is that individuals’ desires and aspirations are not sufficiently constrained by regulative norms. This gives rise to a state of anomie, which can also result in high suicide rates. On the other hand, if the level of social integration and regulation are too high, individuals have an inadequate sense of their own individual autonomy and thus may be susceptible to social expectations that encourage suicide under some conditions, or that lead to extreme demoralization when they fail to fulfill social expectations. This form of suicide would apply, for example, to terrorists who sacrifice their own lives or to defeated military officers whose suicide rates tend to be higher than those of ordinary soldiers. In addition, a group may demand suicide in certain situations. These different conditions give rise to the distinctions Durkheim made between different types of suicide. Suicide that results from inadequate social attachments are classified as **egoistic** suicide, while those resulting from a weak collective consciousness are categorized as **anomic** suicide; both of these types can be seen as resulting from inadequate social integration and regulation. On the other hand, the type of suicide that results from excessive normative regulation is classified as **altruistic** suicide. Durkheim also briefly described a fourth type, **fatalistic** suicide, that can result from excessive social regulation that stifles individual freedom.

For Durkheim the key problem for modern society is to insure an optimal level of social integration by reinforcing adherence to a moral code that would be appropriate for a complex society with a highly developed division of labor and high levels of individualism. Early in his career, he contrasted modern with pre-modern types of social solidarity in terms of the difference between mechanical and organic social solidarity (Durkheim [1893] 1964). “Mechanical” solidarity was grounded in similarities among people, particularly in terms of shared beliefs and values or common membership in the same tribe or village. “Organic” solidarity, in contrast, reflects a higher and more complex division of labor, with solidarity based on increased levels of interdependence. In this type of situation people are often dissimilar, due to the occupational specialization resulting from the increased division of labor. Basically, the evolution from pre-modern to modern forms of society involved a decline in mechanical solidarity and an increase in organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity decreases as people become more heterogeneous in terms of

⁶If only individual factors (such as depression, mental illness, economic misfortune, or whatever) were involved in suicide, this would not explain the patterns Durkheim described in which suicide rates differed among married people versus single people, for example, or Protestants versus Catholics in his society.

occupation and lifestyle. At the same time organic solidarity increases as a consequence of the higher interdependence resulting from the higher division of labor. This transformation leads to the expanded individualism of modern society as well as a decline in repressive laws and an increase in restitutive laws. Repressive laws are characteristic of a society with high mechanical solidarity that seeks to enforce high levels of conformity. Restitutive laws, in contrast, allow greater individualism and are intended to maintain the complex patterns of interdependence which are the foundation for organic solidarity.

Mechanical solidarity does not disappear in modern societies, but it is considerably weakened as a foundation for uniting the entire society. However, among different segments of society, such as religious groups, occupational groups, and social class groups, mechanical solidarity continues to be important. The challenge is for these intermediate-level groups to become aware of the organic interdependence of the whole society so they do not undermine the general welfare for the sake of their own narrow interests. This requires education in civic morality as well as a government that will demonstrate a concern for the whole society and promote an appropriate level of social and moral integration.

When Durkheim later turned his attention to religion, his focus shifted to the question of how external social facts become internalized within individuals' consciousness rather than remaining external to them. This means that society's control over individuals is exercised from within their subjective consciousness – or in other words, their **conscience**.⁷ This collective consciousness (or conscience) is reinforced through participation in collective life, religious rituals in particular. Rituals generate shared emotional experiences that strengthen social solidarity as well as reinforce religious beliefs and moral codes. Durkheim suggested that the decline of traditional religion in modern societies may be seen as an indicator of a decline in social integration and solidarity.

Society's control does not eliminate individual freedom, however. In fact, deviant behavior occurs in all societies as an inevitable outcome of natural variations in people's interests and impulses. Although societies vary in their tolerance of deviance, all societies establish moral boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. The punishment of those whose behaviors are beyond this range of tolerance helps reinforce the moral boundaries between right and wrong but does not eliminate deviance.

Durkheim recognized that social solidarity in modern societies could be threatened by anomie or class conflict. But, in the same spirit as Comte's positivism, Durkheim believed that sociological knowledge could benefit society by helping establish a new foundation for morality and social solidarity. His concern with questions of social solidarity, plus his emphasis on how individuals' consciousness, moral values, and behavior are shaped by the overpowering influence of the social

⁷The French term for conscience also refers to **consciousness** in the broad sense of overall patterns of thought, belief, and feelings as well as individuals' moral sense of right and wrong.

environment, became a major component of structural/functional theory developed by Talcott Parsons in the American sociology during the 1940s and 1950s. In addition to providing a clear alternative to Spencer's individualistic approach, Durkheim's approach also contrasted with the growing influence of Marx and the socialist theorists influenced by him.

Karl Marx: Human Needs, Class Conflict, and Social Change⁸

The work of Karl Marx actually precedes that of Durkheim.⁹ The ideas Marx developed were intended to provide the theoretical rationale for a revolutionary transformation that would be even more radical than the French Revolution near the end of the preceding century (Marx and Engels [1848] in Tucker, ed., 1972:335–362). While the French Revolution had been directed toward replacing the traditional aristocratic type of society with a modern bourgeois social order, Marx believed that the next stage would involve an overthrow of this capitalist system by the newly enlightened and empowered proletarian class. To put this analysis in context, Marx argued that, except for the hypothetical earliest “communist” form of primitive societies, all known historical stages of the past inevitably involved antagonism between social classes, due to their opposing economic class interests. The economic resources human beings need for survival (the “means of production”) have always been unequally distributed, giving rise to society's class structure and the oppression and exploitation of the “have-nots” by the “haves” (the owners of the “means of production”).

This focus on antagonistic class relations illustrates Marx's strategy of using **dialectical analysis** to explore the contradictions built into the structure of society.

⁸This brief description of Marx's contributions is adapted from a more extended overview in D. P. Johnson ([1981] 1986:116–159). See also Coser (1977:43–87) and Turner et al. (2002:102–172) for excellent summaries of Marx's contributions to contemporary sociological theory and his intellectual context. For examples of more extended overviews, see Fromm (1961), Lefebvre (1969), McLellan (1971), and Elster (1886).

⁹Marx was born in 1818 in Trier, Germany, and died in 1883 in London. Like Durkheim he was Jewish, coming from a line of Jewish rabbis on both sides of the family, but his father led the family in converting to Lutheranism for the sake of his career. After training for an academic career, Karl Marx found himself without the necessary sponsorship when his mentor, Bruno Bauer, was dismissed for his leftist and antireligious views. As an alternative Marx embarked on a career in journalism with a liberal bourgeois German newspaper and began to advocate for the cause of peasants and the poor. He later went to Paris, where he met Friedrich Engels and became heavily involved in the socialist movement. Eventually he was expelled from Paris and, after additional moves on the Continent, by the early 1850s went into exile in London, where he and Engels had visited earlier and where he remained until his death. In his London years, Marx reduced his activist role and did his most elaborate analysis of the internal contradictions of the capitalist economic system.

This strategy had earlier been advocated by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to analyze how cultural and intellectual progress results from the clash of opposing ideas. Influenced by the critical Young Hegelians, Marx turned Hegel's approach upside down by emphasizing that the contradictions and conflicts between opposing cultural ideas reflect real-life struggles between the opposing classes that hold these contradictory ideas. Through these conflicts society itself moves toward its next stage of development.

Whether the opposing interests of different social classes result in open conflict or not depends in part on specific historical conditions. When the ruling class is successful in promoting "false consciousness" within the subordinate class, the members of the subordinate class are unable to envision any realistic alternatives to the existing system, despite their exploitation. Instead, the alienation they experience gives rise to a sense of powerlessness to have any meaningful influence on the conditions of their lives. In fact, they are unable even to control the products of their own labor. During a crisis, however, the illusions created through false consciousness become more difficult to sustain. At such crucial periods of history (such as the 1840s in Europe) the subordinate (or working) class is better able to see through the illusions of the dominant ideologies and have their "class consciousness" increased, especially with appropriate ideological leadership. Marx sought to provide such enlightenment, especially during the 1840s, with the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, written with his life-long friend and collaborator Friedrich Engels, published in 1848 (reprinted in Tucker, ed., 1972). His goal was to enable the members of the working class to overcome their alienation and enlist in the struggle to end their exploitation, advance their interests, and thereby transform society into its next historical stage.

The revolution Marx anticipated did not occur, however, and Marx eventually moved to London, where he spent the rest of his life. It was during his London years that he devoted himself to a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the basic economic dynamics of capitalism, leading ultimately to a 3-volume work, *Das Kapital*. Only the first volume was published (in 1867) before his death, however, with his rough drafts of the second and third volumes completed and published after his death in 1883 (see Marx, 1967).

Drawing on the perspective of dialectical analysis, Marx was convinced that the internal contradictions of capitalism would generate periodic crises that ultimately would lead to the revolution that he had earlier attempted actively to promote. He pointed out that with the development of modern capitalism, ownership and control of the means of production was becoming more and more concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Since the material resources needed for survival are always in scarce supply, this increasing concentration of wealth and control over the means of production meant that the level of exploitation had to be increasing. The only feasible resolution would be a society-wide revolutionary struggle that would eliminate class-based divisions through the establishment of a socialist society with collective ownership of the means of production. This, he believed, would contrast with previous transitional stages that simply replaced one type of class-based society with a different system of class domination. Marx's utopian ideal

was that with the overthrow of class domination, the expanded productive capacity provided through modern industrial technology could then be used to improve the standard of living for all members of society rather than to enrich individual capitalists. In this way, the internal contradictions that had always plagued class-based societies would be eliminated.

Marx's early work had already made a major impact in Europe by the time Durkheim developed his alternative vision of how the social problems of modern society could be resolved through sociological knowledge. Marx's ideas continued to influence socialist thought in Europe, however, and, perhaps more significantly, to serve as the ideological inspiration for communism in the Soviet Union—albeit in a restricted and distorted form that was by no means consistent with the humanistic idealism of his early years. Ironically, the Soviet Union's political leaders seemed to reflect Comte's overriding concern with maintaining social order more than Marx's professed goal of human liberation. In effect, as the Soviet Union developed, Marx served primarily as a symbol or icon used by Soviet political leaders in their long-term struggle against capitalism, and the project of ending exploitation and promoting human liberation was indefinitely deferred.

Marx's influence on sociology in America came much later than Durkheim's. Although Marxist-type economic analysis was known among American economists as an alternative to the classical and neo-classical economics developed in Great Britain, its influence on sociology was limited. During the long years of Cold War tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, there was a deep-seated American bias against Marx, without much attention given to his economic and political thought by sociologists. But by the late 1960s, Marx's early humanistic writings (such as his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*) became influential among some American sociologists who were involved in the development of a more critical "new left" perspective (see Marx, 1964). These developments reflected the social struggles and turbulence of that time and will be described in a subsequent chapter on critical theory.

Max Weber: Social Action as the Foundation of Society¹⁰

Max Weber did not deal with Durkheim's work, despite being his contemporary, but he was critical of Marx's one-sided emphasis on material forces and economic interests. Given the sharply different models of society offered by Durkheim and

¹⁰This brief description of Weber's contributions is adapted from a more extended overview in D. P. Johnson ([1981] 1986:202–245). See also Coser (1977:217–260) and Turner et al. (2002:173–250) for excellent brief summaries of Weber's contributions to contemporary sociological theory and their intellectual context. For examples of more extensive overviews of Weber's theoretical perspective, see Bendix (1962) and Randall Collins (1986).

Marx, we might question whether either view by itself is adequate. Everyday life observation suggests that social life includes both cooperative interdependence and solidarity on the one hand and exploitation and conflict on the other. Weber's contributions provide the potential for a more comprehensive analysis that can incorporate both of these competing perspectives.¹¹ His contributions are varied, covering such areas as the sociology of religion, bureaucratic organization, political and economic sociology, and social stratification. Weber emphasized individuals' subjectively meaningful social action as the most fundamental unit of social reality, but his substantive interests involved wide-ranging comparisons among different societies and long-range patterns of social change. His focus on subjective meaning clearly contrasts with Durkheim's initial focus on social facts external to the individual.

The structure of social systems, whether large or small, consists of nothing more than the set of interrelated probabilities that individuals will interact in ways that reflect the nature of their mutual subjective orientations toward one another. For example, an authority relationship exists when there is a high probability that one party believes he or she has the right to give orders, and the other party acquiesces to this right and complies. There may be unique or personal elements in participants' subjective orientations, but these may be ignored when attention is focused on the structure itself. This strategy is the basis for Weber's "ideal type" analysis—a methodological contribution for which Weber is widely recognized in contemporary sociology. An ideal type is an analytical or conceptual construct that highlights certain specific features of people's orientations and actions for purposes of analysis and comparison. For example, even though subordinates in an organization may vary greatly in terms of their personal attitudes toward their boss, the important point to note is the high probability that these subordinates will comply with their boss's orders.

Weber (1947:115–118) distinguished four "ideal types" of social action, reflecting differences in underlying subjective orientations. These include two types of rational action (instrumental versus value-oriented rationality) and two types of nonrational action (traditional and affective). Instrumental rationality involves conscious deliberation and explicit choice with regard to both ends and means; that is, a choice is consciously made from among alternative ends (or goals) and then the appropriate means are selected to achieve the end that has been chosen. Value-oriented rationality, in

¹¹ Max Weber was born in 1864 in Germany into an upper-middle-class Protestant bourgeois family and died in 1920. His father was politically active and had a very pragmatic orientation while his mother was pious and deeply religious. The differing orientations of his father and mother probably contributed to the inner tensions and conflicts that Max Weber experienced during part of his life. Max Weber's theoretical distinction between different types of social action may reflect the contrasting orientations of his parents. Weber studied at the University of Heidelberg and the University of Berlin, served for a time in the law courts, and eventually was appointed to a university teaching position at the University of Berlin. For biographical accounts of Weber's life, see Mitzman (1970) and Marianna Weber ([1926] 1975).

contrast, involves a subjective commitment to an end or goal that is not compared to alternative ends but instead is regarded as ultimate. For such actions the individual's rational choices are limited to selecting the appropriate means. In contrast to these types of rational action involving conscious deliberation and choice, traditional action is followed simply because it is consistent with well-established patterns or is habitual. Affective action expresses feelings or emotions (or affect) without conscious deliberation. All four of these are ideal types, of course; in real life, individuals' actions may reflect varying mixtures.

Weber's ([1930] 1996) analysis of the Protestant ethic and its effects on people's economic behavior, which was originally published in 1904–05 and was one of his earliest contributions to become widely known among American sociologists, fits the category of value-oriented rationality. Briefly, his argument was that Protestant religious beliefs shaped people's motivations in a way that contributed to the growth of capitalism. Specifically, the belief that eternal salvation is provided as a free gift to God's "elect" had the effect of bypassing the priesthood and sacraments of the institutional church. Instead, individuals could relate to God on their own, as implied in the Protestant notion of the "priesthood of all believers." The institutional church in Protestantism was no longer essential for salvation but served instead to strengthen believers' religious commitments. In this context, individuals had to rely primarily upon themselves and their own subjective faith to establish their moral worth and assurance of eternal salvation, though fellow believers in their religious community could provide guidance and reinforcement.

In addition, consistent with this downplaying of the institutional church, Protestants emphasized that all individuals (not just priests or members of religious orders) are expected to demonstrate their religious commitment in their everyday lives, especially in terms of fulfilling the duties of the secular occupations to which God had called them. As secular work thus became "sacralized," Protestantism contributed to the development of a strong work ethic. Diligent adherence to this work ethic could be seen as an indicator of one's moral worth, and the occupational success that was achieved could be regarded as a blessing from God that provided assurance of salvation in the hereafter.

Weber's interest in religion extended beyond Protestantism and included analyses of Hinduism in India (Weber [1916–1917] 1958), Confucianism in China (Weber [1916] 1951), and ancient Judaism (Weber [1917–1919] 1952). His basic argument was that these other religious orientations did not provide the moral incentive for breaking with tradition that could stimulate economic expansion. In this comparative perspective, it becomes clear that whether religion promotes economic change or reinforces tradition and economic stability depends in part on the nature of the religious beliefs themselves. In addition, Weber recognized that the social location and material interests of those who adhere to particular religious orientations are also relevant as well as the overall material conditions in the society. Protestantism was "inner-worldly" (not "other-worldly") and emphasized asceticism (i.e. deferred gratification, discipline, self-denial, and active engagement in the world), as opposed to mysticism. Other types of religious orientation, such as other-worldly mysticism, for instance, would not be expected to have such strong

effects in stimulating economic innovation but would instead support the status quo by default.

Weber's view of the Protestant ethic as a stimulant for the expanding system of capitalism contrasts with Marx's view that religion leads to passive acceptance of the status quo. Of course, the meaning of the Protestant ethic no doubt differed for bourgeois capitalists and proletarian workers. Successful capitalist entrepreneurs could regard their success as a sign of God's blessing and, since the moral discipline associated with the work ethic discouraged idleness as well as the enjoyment of luxury, they could use their profits to expand their business. For workers, however, the moral discipline of the work ethic meant they should be diligent in performing their occupational tasks, regardless of how lowly they might be, which of course was a crucial contribution to the success of their capitalist employers as well as being essential for their own economic survival.

Weber also pointed out that the work ethic eventually became secularized, which meant that it no longer depended on religious concerns with glorifying or obeying God or salvation in the hereafter. This resulted in part from the way an increasingly affluent economy gradually undermined the ascetic lifestyle promoted in early Protestantism, and in part to the fact that regular work in an occupation became necessary for economic survival. Weber took religious motivations seriously but he did not assume that religious beliefs are always dominant in people's motivations. A devout Protestant entrepreneur might be motivated by religious concerns while a less devout Protestant capitalist may simply want to make money. Workers might feel they were fulfilling their religious duty in their work; they might hope to move up in the occupational hierarchy, or they might simply have no choice but to work in order to meet their material needs. Whether people are motivated primarily by their material (economic) interests or by ideal (religious) interests requires understanding their subjective orientations.

Individuals' actions, with their subjective orientations, are the basic building blocks of social structures of all types. Weber contrasted different forms of social organization ranging from social relationships to economic and political social orders, including bureaucratic organizations, in terms of the underlying subjective orientations of their participants. Bureaucratic organization represents the triumph of instrumental rationality as applied to social organization. Although the terms **bureaucracy** and **bureaucrat** have long been used in a negative way to describe excessive red tape and rigid adherence to rules and regulations, Weber's focus was on the way bureaucratic organizations are more efficient for large-scale and long-term administration than other forms of organization. Their **rational-legal** authority structures are based on formally enacted rules that define the duties associated with their various positions and the scope of officials' authority. This emphasis on formal and pragmatic rationality is intended to exclude both personal feelings and ultimate value considerations from the exercise of authority and the routine fulfillment of organizational responsibilities. When coupled with a secularized form of the work ethic, a bureaucratically-dominated society runs a serious risk of becoming a kind of dehumanized and controlling "iron cage" leading to widespread alienation.

Weber (1947:234–363) contrasted the rational-legal type of authority system as manifested in bureaucratic organizations with **traditional** and **charismatic** authority systems. A traditional authority system is based on people's acceptance of the traditions that define it. As developed in patrimonial systems, authority structures are basically extensions of family relationships, but they can be expanded through a wide range of personal ties involving various types of relationships of domination and subordination that eventually become traditionalized. In contrast, charismatic authority is based on people's beliefs in the extraordinary personal qualities of a particular leader, the inspiration such beliefs inspire, and the emotional bonds established between the leader and his or her disciples.

Authority systems of all types may be contrasted with **power** structures. Power involves the ability to carry out one's will despite opposition and does not necessarily rest on a belief in legitimacy. Authority is often backed up with power, of course, and people with high levels of power may attempt to promote acceptance of their domination as legitimate, thereby transforming power into authority. The concept of power can be related to Weber's three-dimensional model of social stratification. In contrast to Marx, Weber distinguished the power structure from the economic class structure. For Marx, those who control the means of production are also able to control the power structure of the political system as well. But for Weber, one's economic class and one's position in the hierarchy of political power are analytically distinct and may vary independently (although of course they may overlap).

A third basis for stratification in Weber's view involves hierarchies of prestige or honor that give rise to different status groups. This hierarchy depends on subjective standards of evaluation people use to establish high or low prestige. Status hierarchies may overlap with economic or political hierarchies but are analytically distinct. Criteria for prestige ranking include whatever characteristics are deemed important, including, for example, religion, lifestyle, ethnicity, age, education, or other criteria that can be used to make meaningful distinctions.

Weber's three-fold model of social stratification is one of his enduring contributions to contemporary sociology. Even when there is high overlap among these dimensions of stratification, their differences are important to note. When these dimensions are not consistent, people sometimes attempt to use their high rank on one dimension to attempt to improve their rank on the other(s). For example, wealthy people may make large financial donations to museums, universities, or other charitable causes in an effort to increase their prestige or honor. Or, people may use their economic resources to gain political power.

Despite Weber's focus on individuals' subjectively meaningful social action, many of his substantive analyses were at the macro-level. Between individuals' social actions and social systems of all types, there is the crucial process of **interaction** between or among people. This was the primary focus of Georg Simmel's strategy for sociological analysis.

*Georg Simmel: Interaction Processes*¹²

Georg Simmel identified sociology's task as identifying the **forms of interaction** whereby society itself is created.¹³ These forms often include varying mixtures of both cooperation and conflict. In contrast to the **forms**, the **contents** of interaction consist of the particular needs or goals that people pursue through interaction (Simmel, 1950:40). In contrast to both Durkheim and Marx, much of Simmel's analysis was at the micro-level. Nevertheless, with Simmel's perspective we might regard the opposing approaches of Durkheim and Marx as providing limited, one-sided views.

Simmel did not provide a systematic theory of the forms of interaction, but he offered numerous examples of such forms, showing how they could be identified, subdivided, contrasted with one another, and manifested in various settings. In some cases, he extended his analysis from micro level examples to macro level manifestations of particular forms. More than any other classical theorist Georg Simmel insisted that society does not exist independently of the **process of interaction**. For example, superordination (or dominance) and subordination demonstrate reciprocity, despite the inequality of the relationship (for a discussion of various forms of subordination, see Simmel, 1950:179–303). Through participating in the interaction process, even subordinates may influence the nature of their relationship with their social superiors. Moreover, superordinates themselves are likely to take subordinates' anticipated reactions into consideration in some fashion, even if only to exercise control more effectively. Relations between superordinates and subordinates are obviously shot through with possibilities for conflict. In a hierarchical system, for example, subordinates may unite among themselves as they resist the demands of superordinates in an effort to protect their own interests. (This can be compared to the development of class consciousness in Marx's theory.)

As a basic form of interaction, conflict is often closely linked with cohesion (Simmel, 1955:13–123). When conflict erupts between groups, the solidarity within each group is likely to be strengthened. Even internal conflict may be related to solidarity, especially if the group is not engaged in external conflict. High solidarity

¹² This brief summary of Simmel's contributions is adapted from a more extended overview in D. P. Johnson ([1981] 1986:246–287). See also Coser (1977:177–215) and Turner et al. (2002:251–306) for excellent summaries of Simmel's contributions to contemporary sociological theory and their intellectual context. For additional reading, see Simmel (1950, including the Introduction by Kurt H. Wolff for an overview of Simmel's work), Spykman (1964), and Coser (1965).

¹³ Georg Simmel (1858–1918) was a contemporary of both Weber and Durkheim. He received his doctorate from the University of Berlin in 1881 where he began teaching in 1885. His university lectures were popular among Berlin's intellectual elite. In 1914 he left Berlin to accept a position at the University of Strasbourg but, unfortunately, academic life was soon disrupted by the outbreak of war. He was involved (along with Max Weber and Ferdinand Tönnies) in establishing the German Society for Sociology.

means that members have high expectations of one another, and these expectations may sometimes collide. Moreover, the emotional intensity of personal relationships in highly cohesive groups, plus the familiarity of members with one another, increase the odds that conflict will be more intense and personal than in less cohesive groups. Also, members of highly cohesive groups may sometimes feel the need to assert their autonomy to prevent being dominated by the group. In contrast, less cohesive groups may simply disband or fragment with the eruption of conflict. And if members are united more by pragmatic interests than emotional ties, conflict issues will be easier to negotiate through mutual compromise.

Just as cohesive relationships have the seeds of conflict, so also conflictual relationships may include potential sources of unification. With competition, the fact that both parties desire the same goal is actually a source of unity between them. Also, with both competition and conflict, rules are likely to be developed to regulate the conflict and establish its boundaries, and such rules provide a basis for at least a minimal level of unity. Sometimes, too, enemies eventually become allies, especially when both are threatened by a third party.

Despite Simmel's distinction between the forms of interaction and its contents, in some cases a form may serve as its own content. In competitive games, for example, participants are involved for the sake of the conflict itself, not for other purposes, such as economic gain, political power, or other interests. (This would probably not apply to professional sports, in which participants are presumably motivated by economic interests.) With **sociability** also, the interaction itself serves as its own content; people interact simply because of the pleasure it provides (Simmel, 1950:40–57). Sociable interaction at parties illustrates this form, provided participants do not have some ulterior motive, such as enhancing their reputation or establishing business or professional contacts. Such interaction contrasts with utilitarian forms of interaction that are intended to pursue personal goals or interests.

Simmel (1950:87–117) also showed how forms of interaction are affected by the numbers of people involved. His best known example contrasts a dyad versus a triad—a contrast that can easily be illustrated when a conversation between two persons is interrupted by the appearance of a third party (Simmel, 1950:118–144). Simmel suggested that a three-person encounter serves as a kind of microcosm of the larger social world. With only two persons, each can relate to the other as a unique person in a way that is not possible with three persons or in any larger system. With more than two persons, each party will need to consider what the others have in common, at least potentially. Even if a third party is silent, he or she still serves as an audience.

Simmel (1950:145–169) identified four third party roles that are impossible in two-person relationships. These include the roles of mediator, arbitrator, one who enjoys (“*Tertius Gaudens*”), and one who seeks to divide and conquer. Interestingly, all four of these roles involve conflict between two parties. The roles of mediator and arbitrator are widely understood, the main difference being that the mediator helps the two parties resolve their differences themselves, while the arbitrator actually makes the decision on how to resolve the conflict with the understanding that it will be accepted. The “*Tertius Gaudens*” role involves observing the conflict,

perhaps for amusement but often to benefit from it. The “divide and conquer” role involves the third party in promoting conflict in order to benefit. Simmel showed how these roles apply at the macro level as well as in face-to-face relations. For example, consumers in a society play the “*Tertius Gaudens*” role as they benefit from the competition of sellers in the marketplace.

Simmel’s analysis of the effects of numbers on forms of interaction can easily be extended with the addition of greater numbers of participants. For very small groups, the addition of just one more person is likely to influence the dynamics of the group. For example, adding a fourth person, and a fifth, and so on opens up new options not possible with smaller groups. Beyond a certain size threshold, the probability of subgroup formation increases. For an enduring group, definite changes in interaction patterns occur when a group becomes too large for all its members to meet together at one time or to know one another personally. If it becomes too large for face-to-face interaction, formal rules, designated leaders, delegation of authority and responsibilities, and strategies for collective decision making will be needed. (This explanation of how impersonal forms of organization result from an increase in a group’s size might be compared with Weber’s model of bureaucracy.)

Simmel (1955:125–195) contrasted modern and pre-modern types of society in terms of the nature of the linkage between individuals and the overall society. In pre-modern societies individuals tend to be absorbed in small-scale local groups or organizations with their whole identities or personalities, with their linkages to larger social organizations mediated through these groups. In contrast, in modern urban societies individuals are more likely to have limited (or segmental) involvement in a large variety of different social groups or organizations. Thus they are more likely than in pre-modern societies to be at the intersection of numerous overlapping social circles, corresponding to the various independent special-purpose groups in which they participate. Simmel believed that as the claims of individuals’ various group memberships are limited in modern society, prospects for individual freedom are enhanced. On the other hand, as society becomes larger and more complex, it becomes more difficult for individuals to identify with the overall society or to feel that their participation is significant. This apparent diminishment of the individual is a potential source of alienation and feelings of powerlessness, which, ironically, increase at the same time that freedom from social constraints expands. Such are the dilemmas of modern society.

The impersonal nature of many transactions in modern society is reflected in our increased reliance on money. Simmel emphasized how money facilitates the expansion of exchange transactions beyond the level of personal reputations (Spykman, 1964:215–253; Simmel, 1950:409–424). Reliance on money thus reflects the impersonality, the rationality, and the functional specificity of social encounters in modern society. People can participate in market transactions without any personal engagement with one another at all beyond the specific transaction at hand. Money also helps enhance individual freedom—at least for those with a sufficient supply of it. In this respect its sociological significance is somewhat similar to that of segmental involvement in multiple special-interest groups.

Despite his strong focus on micro-level interaction, Simmel's analysis of modern society is consistent with that of other nineteenth-century European theorists in portraying a long-term evolutionary transformation from small-scale, relatively simple, homogeneous types of society to large-scale, complex societies with much greater heterogeneity. His analysis is also consistent with the increasing importance of bureaucratic organization and market transactions in modern society.

Other Important Pioneers

In addition to Durkheim, Marx, Weber, and Simmel, there were others who were also recognized in previous years for contributing to the establishment of sociology. Still others have come to be recognized more recently. What is regarded as the essential "canon" of the founding period of sociology changes over the years, and one of the major concerns of many contemporaries is to be more inclusive in incorporating the voices of those not previously recognized. The following European figures are summarized in the order of their birth years.

Harriet Martineau: Discovering the Discrepancy Between Morals and Manners

Harriet Martineau (1802–1876), a contemporary of Auguste Comte, lived before sociology's establishment as a recognized discipline, but her strategies of social research and critical analysis anticipated later developments (see Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998:39–45). She was born in Norwich, England, a center of religious dissent from the established Church of England. She became well known and financially successful through her journalistic writings on political economy that helped popularize the ideas of classical British economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo, among others. She visited America and spent two years traveling throughout the country. Her books based on this experience demonstrated her distinctive style of critical and comparative analysis based on intensive participant observation (Martineau, 1836/1837, 1838b).

In their summary of the significant contributions of women sociologists between 1830 and 1930, Patricia Madoo Lengermann and Jill Niebrugge-Brantley (1998:23–45) make a persuasive case for including Harriet Martineau among the pioneer figures in sociological theory. For most of the second half of the twentieth century, Martineau was known among American sociologists primarily for her translation of Auguste Comte's work, but she condensed and edited it as well. Comte himself admired her translation and revision so much that he had it translated back into French (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998:28). Martineau shared Comte's ideas regarding systematic empirical research as a basis for knowledge that could be used to promote continued progress. However, Martineau's primary commitment

was with furthering human equality and happiness, in contrast to Comte's concern with preserving order while also promoting social and intellectual progress. In this spirit she strongly opposed slavery in the United States as well as the subordination of women in all societies. Martineau's method of participant observation research contrasts sharply with Comte's more detached style of analysis (Martineau, 1838a). Reflecting her travel experiences in America, she advocated a systematic and sympathetic form of research, based on conversations with a wide range of people, that would capture the details of their everyday lives. She was also interested in objective indicators of people's collective mentality and representative cultural patterns. Such indicators include not only the everyday customs that people followed in meeting their basic survival needs, but architectural styles, epitaphs on tombstones, music, and public gatherings.

Martineau's (1838a) research guidelines on observing manners and morals were published several decades before the publication of Durkheim's more frequently cited book, *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Her methodology differed sharply from Durkheim's by being grounded in intensive participant observation. This difference is reflected in contemporary sociology in the contrast between quantitative research designed to test general theoretical propositions and qualitative research that incorporates "thick" descriptions of the details of everyday life.

Martineau's focus on "morals" and "manners" made it possible for her to develop a critical analysis based on the discrepancies she observed between widely professed values and actual practices. She took American "morals" to be the ideals and beliefs regarding equality and democracy as expressed in documents such as the Declaration of Independence. These principles were consistent with eighteenth century Enlightenment ideals that formed part of Martineau's own intellectual background. But the "manners" she observed in everyday life often contradicted the moral values that were widely professed. These contradictions were particularly glaring with regard to the situations of slaves and of women, since neither slaves nor women were treated as equal to white males in America. Martineau pointed out that the everyday life treatment of both slaves and women was not consistent with one of the most basic principles of democracy—namely, that the laws governing people's behavior should be based on their consent.

Martineau's strong support for women's equality, plus her critique of everyday life experience, particularly domestic life, mark her as an early pioneer in the type of analysis promoted by many contemporary feminist scholars. Her goal of using knowledge gained through sociological research to promote social progress, equality, and human autonomy and well-being is consistent with contemporary critical and feminist theory. Although her critique of slavery would not apply in the United States today, her more general concern with problems of domination and subordination are still relevant with regard to women as well as other marginalized groups in society. On a more general level Martineau pointed out the negative effects of excessive economic competition in America, noting how it contributes to increasing levels of inequality in society, thereby reducing individuals' moral autonomy and increasing their anxiety.

Alexis de Tocqueville: An Analysis of American Democracy

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–1859) was a French politician whose book, *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville, 1945), was also based on his visit to America in 1831. Although the American colonies and France had both experienced revolutions near the end of the previous century, the United States, unlike France, did not have the legacy of a long-established aristocratic social order or monarchy to be overthrown. This contrast with his own society probably increased de Tocqueville's fascination with the United States and the promise it held for fulfilling the dreams of liberty, fraternity, and equality that had inspired the French Revolution.

De Tocqueville admired American society greatly and believed that its democratic form of government was the wave of the future. At the same time, he cautioned that a democratic society was vulnerable to excessive individualism as well as to the development of strong social pressures for conformity that could stifle creativity and the rights of minorities or outsiders. He recognized that to be truly effective democracy depends on the widespread civic participation that he observed at the time in the United States. He felt that extensive citizen participation in various voluntary organizations, churches, and local government would help moderate excessive individualism, serve as an important mechanism for self-governance, and help prevent despotic rule by the central government. Despite the potential problems that he realized could develop with the American experiment in self-governance, de Tocqueville was generally quite optimistic about the relatively young United States of America.

Vilfredo Pareto: Logical Versus Nonlogical Action

Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923), an Italian social theorist, became an economist and later a sociologist following his earlier training in the physical sciences and mathematics for a career as an engineer. (See Coser [1977:387–426] and Turner et al. [2002:379–433] for excellent brief summaries of Pareto's intellectual context and his contributions to sociological theory.) Despite the apparent rationality manifested in the cost/benefit analysis of economic action, Pareto ([1916] 1935) was convinced that a great deal of human behavior is nonlogical, based on sentiments rather than rational calculation. For example, even people's preferences as consumers are often likely to reflect traditions or social status considerations more than purely economic cost/benefit considerations.

Pareto viewed action as **logical** or rational to the extent that it reflects objective cause-and-effect relations that can be used to demonstrate its effectiveness in reaching desired ends. However, the explanations people offer for their actions are often outside the bounds of what can be evaluated as rational or irrational, logical or illogical. When actions are explained in terms that fail to meet logical or scientific standards, they should be considered **nonlogical**. For example, an engineer designing a bridge

would engage in logical action if decisions on materials and techniques are based on scientific principles or past experience to insure that the bridge will not collapse. However, if the engineer were also to engage in a religious or magical ritual to insure safety in the construction process, this would be considered nonlogical because there is no scientific basis for claiming that the ritual reduces the chances of having accidents.

Pareto labeled the explanations people might offer for their actions as the **derivations**, while the real underlying reasons that motivate their behavior, which he termed the **residues**, reflect their underlying sentiments. The derivations are highly variable for different people, due to differences in their particular cultural or subcultural traditions. The residues are more constant, since the sentiments on which they are based may be considered part of human nature. This does not mean that people themselves are necessarily insincere or cynical in the “rational” explanations they offer. But they may be unaware of the influence of the residues. Pareto’s distinction between underlying motives and sentiments and the explanations that people offer to explain their actions is regarded as one of the most distinctive insights he developed in his efforts to establish sociology as a scientific discipline.¹⁴

Pareto’s theory of the “circulation of elites” has also been viewed among subsequent generations of theorists as an important model of the dynamics of political processes. Essentially, this model explains how society’s political elites tend to alternate between liberal-type innovators and tradition-bound conservatives. These two “types” reflect different “residues” as defined above, with the liberals having a high concentration of the “new combinations” residue and the conservatives having a high concentration of the “persistence of aggregates” residue. The concept of “new combinations” suggests a willingness to try different kinds of policies and procedures (the liberal pattern), while the concept of “persistence of aggregates” implies a desire to maintain the status quo (the conservative pattern).

Pareto characterized those who give priority to “new combinations” as the foxes, while those who give priority to the “persistence of aggregates” are labeled as the lions. His cyclical model portrays a pattern in which the coercive control of lions alternates with the cunning guile of foxes in the political power structure of society. Once innovator-type leaders gain power through guile and fraud, there is a gradual shift to more conservative strategies and an increasingly strong appeal to tradition, reinforced by force if necessary. This can be seen as leading to a strengthened “law and order” strategy. Eventually, this reliance on tradition and force becomes excessively rigid and loses its effectiveness, at which point the conservatives become vulnerable to the machinations of rising innovative liberals whose cunning strategies ultimately overthrow the conservatives. The cycle is then repeated. In the long run there is equilibrium among all the various elements of society, including the political system,

¹⁴ As we shall see in Chapter 12, Pareto’s approach was analyzed in detail in Talcott Parsons’ theory of social action as an example of a positivistic perspective that was overly deterministic and failed to give sufficient emphasis to the role of normative commitments that influence individuals’ choices.

but it is a cyclical pattern rather than a static equilibrium. This cyclical model differs from the evolutionary models previously discussed in which social change is envisioned as a straight-line linear process. In contrast to Marx, the focus is more on political conflict than economic. Also unlike Marx, Pareto did not envision any ultimate resolution in a future utopian socialist society.

Ferdinand Tönnies: Contrasting Community and Society

Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936), a German sociologist, is most often remembered for his analysis of the contrast between **community** and **society**—terms which are translations of the title of his best-known work, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tönnies [1887] 1963). (*Gesellschaft* may also be translated as *association*.) (These German words are sometimes used in English-language sociology textbooks and discourse as more or less technical terms for the different types of social order they represent.) Tönnies used these terms to deal with the typical nineteenth-century concern with the long-range development of modern society. The pre-modern *Gemeinschaftliche* (community-type) social order typically is small-scale, rural or village-based, and involves a strong emphasis on family ties and other types of personal social relations. Individualism is not highly developed. Religion and traditional customs and forms of morality have a strong unifying influence on people's worldviews and lifestyles. In contrast, the modern *Gesellschaftliche* (society-type or associational) social order is a larger-scale, more urbanized type of society. Although family and personal relations continue to exist, the overall system is characterized by the expansion of impersonal relations that are established for specific purposes (trade, commerce, political regulation). The influence of religion and traditional customs and moral standards decreases, and formally enacted law becomes relatively more important.

Tönnies considered these two types of social order to express two distinctively different types of will (or mentality), with the *Gemeinschaft* reflecting a **natural** will and the *Gesellschaft* a more **rational** will. The natural will is manifested in a social structure characterized by high organic unity, diffuse personal relationships, and behavior governed by strong traditions rather than being highly reflective or calculating. In contrast, the rational will is expressed in a social structure that has a more deliberately contrived character, and with a much greater proportion of specialized, segmental social relations intentionally established through formal contracts.

Marianne Weber: Exposing the Subordination of Women at Home and Work

Although long known in American sociology primarily as Max Weber's wife, Marianne Weber (1870–1954) was an influential and productive sociologist in her own right and deserves to be included among the founders of the field (Lengermann

and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998:193–214).¹⁵ Her work centered largely on the subordinate status of women in the marriage relationship and in the larger society. This persistent subordination restricted women's opportunities to develop their full human potential and to contribute to society.

Marianne Weber's childhood was stressful. Her mother, whose grandfather was the brother of Max Weber's father, died when she was two years old. She eventually lived with her aunt on her mother's side for a time but eventually moved to the home of Max Weber, Sr. and his wife Helene, where she was attracted to her future husband, Max Weber, Jr. Following marriage she devoted herself to her own intellectual and academic pursuits and became involved with the emerging feminist movement in Germany. Husband Max Weber supported these efforts. However, Marianne Weber found herself in the position of supportive caregiver during her husband's severe depression that followed the death of his father. (The onset of Max Weber's depression had occurred shortly after a confrontation with his father over the way his father treated his mother.)

During Marianne Weber's life the issue of women's status and role in society had become a significant topic of discussion in Germany. Marianne Weber (here-after Weber in this section) was highly influential as a liberal feminist whose expertise was established by the publication (in 1907) of her book, *Marriage, Motherhood, and the Law* (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998:197). She lectured widely on feminist issues and served for a time as president of the Federation of German Women's Organizations (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley, 1998:201). In addition to her numerous writings on marriage and women's issues, she also wrote a biography of Max Weber ([1926] 1975) plus an autobiography of her own that was published in 1948.¹⁶

Marianna Weber's theoretical contributions went well beyond a simple critique of women's subordinate status in the home and in society, which was particularly pronounced in Germany at that time. She saw the marriage rules of society as the key to understanding the unequal relations between women and men. Despite women's subordinate status in marriage, Weber identified certain crucial historical developments that had helped moderate males' domination. For one thing, the development of the ideal of monogamy led to an increasing recognition of husbands' obligations and duties to their wives. Also, mothers shared authority over

¹⁵In addition to her own distinctive contributions to sociology, Marianna Weber organized many of Max Weber's unpublished manuscripts after his death and arranged for their publication.

¹⁶Regrettably, much of Marianna Weber's work has not yet been translated into English. Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1998:193) report that, except for the translated material they provide in their text/reader, the only work by Marianna Weber that has been translated into English is *Max Weber: A Biography* (Weber [1926] 1975). The works described in this section that have not been translated are not included in the list of references at the end of this book. Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1998:203–211) show how Marianne Weber's clear feminist focus contrasts with the perspectives of husband Max Weber as well as Georg Simmel.

young children with their husbands, and these shared parental roles reflected a pattern of partnership in the rearing of children. Moreover, the somewhat negative or ambivalent attitude of some in the early Christian church toward sexual activity carried the implication that the strong mutual intimacy of the marital bond should not be based on sex alone. In addition, just as Max Weber analyzed the importance of Protestantism for the rise of capitalism, so also Marianne Weber pointed out that Protestant beliefs in freedom of conscience and the equality of all human beings, both women and men, before God were inconsistent with all forms of domination. For Marianne Weber, domination undermines human autonomy and dignity.

Weber focused explicitly on the strains and dilemmas in marriage resulting from the conflicting dynamics of subordination versus intimacy. To put it succinctly, intimacy implies equality; therefore, domination undermines intimacy. Intimacy includes sexuality and eroticism, which Weber regarded as highly important for women as well as men. However, sexual intimacy alone is not sufficient to maintain a satisfying long-term marital relationship; emotional intimacy is also required, and this is difficult to achieve in relations involving domination of one party by the other.

Weber also described the personal humiliation that wives feel when they are totally dependent financially upon their husbands and so must justify requests for funds for household and personal expenses. To avoid such subordination would require women to have their own independent source of income. This means that women who contribute to their families, and to society, by maintaining a household deserve financial remuneration as well as those in paid employment outside the home, especially considering that men's accomplishments in public life are supported by their wives' contributions to the well-being of their families and the maintenance of their households. The logistics of how financial remuneration for household and family responsibilities should be worked out are difficult, especially in view of socioeconomic class disparities and other variations among different households. Even so, Weber suggested that arrangements should be made in the household budget for the wife to receive a specific sum of money on a regular basis for household maintenance plus funds for her own personal use.

In arguing for the importance of being provided funds for household responsibilities, Weber certainly did not intend to imply that women should be limited to the household or other traditional feminine spheres of activity. Instead, women should be equal to men in being able to develop their full human potential and to contribute to society in terms of their distinctive interests and abilities. Weber recognized that women themselves differ from one another, based in part on their social location and socioeconomic class position. The issues Weber identified are still urgent issues on the contemporary feminist agenda. These include the economic, domestic, and sexual dimensions of women's subordination, variations among women based on their different social locations, the crucial importance of pursuing the goal of gender equality, and the potential for women to expand their contributions in all areas of social life.

Summary

Although this book deals mostly with contemporary theories, the key ideas of the major founders of the field are important as a foundation. Each of the theorists whose major contributions were briefly reviewed in this chapter dealt with issues and questions of their own time. But their analyses also have relevance to our time, despite the wide-ranging social changes that have occurred over the course of the last century and the important advances made in the discipline since its early years. Specific features of the social and intellectual background that were relevant during the time of sociology's establishment include the rise of science, technological advances leading to the Industrial Revolution, the social transformations involved in the transition from "traditional" to "modern" society, the discovery of social and cultural variations among various non-European peoples, and a recognition of the persistent foundations of the nonrational dimension in social life.

We noted briefly Ibn Khaldun's cyclical theory of the rise and fall of city civilizations in the desert, Herbert Spencer's theory of the evolution of increasingly complex societies, and Auguste Comte's three-stage theory of social and intellectual progress. Of these three, Khaldun had no influence on the development of sociology in Europe; Comte's work had an important influence on Durkheim; and Spencer had an impact in the early years by providing the theoretical underpinning for an individualistic, *laissez-faire* evolutionary theory.

The pioneering scholars whose works have generally been considered the most important in recent years for establishing the foundations of the field are Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Georg Simmel. Émile Durkheim reflects the influence of French positivism in seeking to establish sociology as an empirical science grounded on discoveries of important correlations among social facts. But he eventually went beyond this perspective in showing how the social order reflects a shared moral code that exists in people's subjective consciousness, not just as an external social fact. A large part of his theoretical analysis contrasted the moral consciousness of simple societies characterized by a low division of labor with that of modern societies in which a high level of interdependence, coupled with a high level of individualism, results from a greatly expanded division of labor.

Durkheim's theoretical perspective can be seen as an alternative to the critical conflict perspective of Karl Marx. Marx had rejected the strong emphasis of the determining influence of cultural ideas as reflected in German historicism. For him, the development of sociology required an analysis of how the actual material and social conditions of people's lives influenced their consciousness and behavior as well as their opportunities to develop their full human potential. With his focus on the economic class structure, he saw class divisions in modern society deepening as a result of the advancing centralization of the means of production and capitalists' expanding levels of exploitation of workers in their efforts to increase their profits. Although the capitalist system was subject to periodic crises, their resolution should not be expected to end the process of exploitation and class conflict until the capitalist system is eventually overthrown through revolutionary struggle.

Reflecting the influence of German historicism, Max Weber's work emphasized the importance of understanding cultural values that vary in different societies as they affect individuals' subjective consciousness and motivations. This was manifested in his analysis of the influence of the Protestant ethic on the development of capitalism, especially when compared with the economic influences of other religions. However, people's subjective interpretations of their values (religious and otherwise) will reflect their particular position in the social structure and the material and social interests associated with these positions. Like Marx, Weber recognized that people's social behavior is heavily influenced by their material and social environment, including not only their economic class position but their position in hierarchies of power as well as status and prestige. Weber analyzed modern bureaucratic organizations as structures of power and authority that are organized according to the logic of instrumental rationality, with concerns about ultimate values and underlying human needs subordinated to this constraining type of rule-governed rationality oriented toward pragmatic goals.

Simmel is unique among the four leading classical theorists in emphasizing the micro level. However, he moved back and forth between micro and macro levels, showing how similar types of social processes can be manifested at different levels. Although his intellectual environment was permeated by German historicism, his work dealt mainly with forms or patterns of interaction. Both social conflict and social cohesion can be regarded as basic forms of interaction in his perspective. This focus on both conflict and cohesion allows for incorporation of Durkheim's emphasis on interdependence and solidarity plus Marx's analysis of class conflict. Simmel also contrasted forms of interaction and patterns of individual involvement in small-scale social settings and those in larger social systems, and he emphasized how the latter are becoming more and more important in modern society.

None of the four leading classical theorists represent the British tradition as described in the last chapter. Instead, this British tradition served as a kind of foil for both Marx and Durkheim, as their perspectives were developed partly in opposition to its individualistic *laissez-faire* emphasis. Marx criticized economist Adam Smith by arguing that the unregulated market system did not promote the overall well-being of society but led instead to increasing levels of inequality and exploitation. Durkheim rejected the individualistic assumptions of sociologist Herbert Spencer and argued that individuals reflect the formative influence of society for their development as human beings. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, the individualistic implications of British social thought were highly compatible with the type of sociology that developed in America.

The remaining theorists reviewed in this chapter were also important for their contributions to the establishment of the sociological perspective, even though their long-term impact on contemporary sociology has not been emphasized as heavily as the impact of the four theorists identified above. Martineau pioneered in the development of participant observation ethnographic research that revealed clear discrepancies between cultural values and ideals (morals) and actual customs and practices (manners). De Tocqueville's analysis of democracy in America demonstrated how various voluntary groups (including churches) and local

governments stimulated civic involvement and linked individual citizens to the larger social order. Pareto emphasized the importance of understanding the non-rational sentiments that motivate behavior as opposed to the rational explanations people may offer, and he incorporated this perspective in his model of the “circulation of elites” in which conservatives and innovative liberals tend to alternate in the political power structure. Tönnies’ distinction between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) showed how people’s natural social ties in traditional types of communities can be contrasted with the contractual nature of their relationships in formally established organizations in modern societies. And finally, Marianne Weber identified women’s economic dependence on their husbands’ as the primary source of their subordination in both their families and in the wider society—a pattern that she showed was in sharp conflict with the Protestant (and Christian) ideal of the equality of all people. American sociology was heavily influenced by these various European theorists but was distinctly different from any of them. We turn in the next chapter to the story of the development of American sociology, noting the influence of these European sources as appropriate.

Questions for Study and Discussion

1. Of all of the different theorists whose ideas have been reviewed in this chapter, which do you feel are most relevant in providing insights into the fundamental characteristics and major trends of contemporary society? Which are the least relevant? Explain your answers.
2. Explain how Durkheim’s perspective on the increased division of labor in modern society can be compared and contrasted with Weber’s analysis of bureaucratic organization and authority structures and with Tönnies’ views regarding the growth in *Gesellschaft* types of structures.
3. Give an example of each of the two types of rational action identified by Weber—instrumental rationality and value-oriented rationality. How can these two types of rationality be related to the feminist issues identified by Marianna Weber and the moral challenges of a complex society as analyzed by Durkheim?
4. Explain how Simmel’s analysis of the effects of numbers on forms of interaction can be used to explain changes in the social structure and personal relationships of people in small village-type communities versus large urban areas. How would these differences compare and contrast with Tönnies analysis of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*?
5. From the beginning sociology has reflected a concern with current social problems and moral challenges. Identify some major examples of the crucial moral challenges that can be identified in the works of Durkheim, Marx, Martineau, and Marianna Weber.

Contemporary Sociological Theory
An Integrated Multi-Level Approach

Johnson, D.P.

2008, XXII, 630 p. 3 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-387-76521-1