

# 2

## A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory

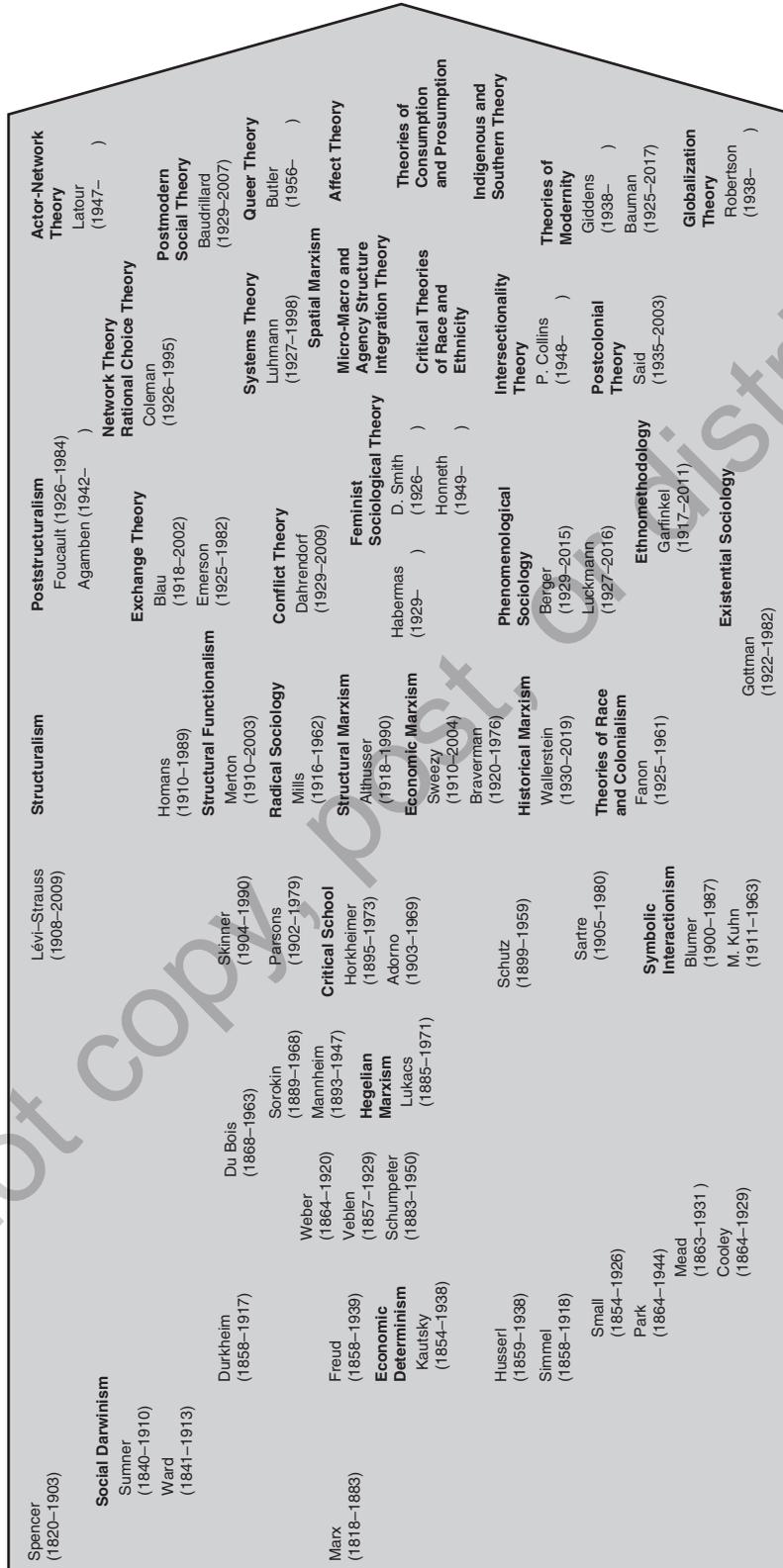
### The Later Years

#### Chapter Outline

- Early American Sociological Theory
- Sociological Theory to Midcentury
- Sociological Theory from Midcentury
- Late Twentieth-Century Integrative Theory
- Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity
- Social Theory in the Twenty-First Century

It is difficult to give a precise date for the founding of sociology in the United States. A course in social problems was taught at Oberlin as early as 1858, Auguste Comte's term *sociology* was used by George Fitzhugh in 1854, and William Graham Sumner taught social science courses at Yale beginning in 1873 (see Figure 2.1). During the 1880s, courses specifically bearing the title "Sociology" began to appear. The first department with *sociology* in its name was founded at the University of Kansas in 1889. In 1892, Albion Small moved to the University of Chicago and set up the new Department of Sociology. In 1897, W. E. B. Du Bois started to build the sociology department at Atlanta University. Although, historically, the Chicago department has been called the first important center of American sociology (Matthews, 1977), Earl Wright (2002) and Aldon Morris (2015) have argued that the Du Bois-Atlanta school can make equal claim to that title.

**FIGURE 2.1 • Sociological Theory: The Later Years**



## Early American Sociological Theory

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### Politics

Julia Schwendinger and Herman Schwendinger (1974) argued that the early American sociologists are best described as political liberals and not, as was true of most early European theorists, as conservatives. The liberalism characteristic of early American sociology had two basic elements. First, it operated with a belief in the freedom and welfare of the individual. In this belief, it was influenced far more by Herbert Spencer's orientation than by Comte's more collective position. Second, many sociologists associated with this orientation adopted an evolutionary view of social progress (W. Fine, 1979). However, they were split over how best to bring about this progress. Some argued that steps should be taken by the government to aid social reform, whereas others pushed a *laissez-faire* doctrine, arguing that the various components of society should be left to solve their own problems.

Liberalism, taken to its extreme, comes very close to conservatism. Both the belief in social progress—in reform or a *laissez-faire* doctrine—and the belief in the importance of the individual lead to positions supportive of the system as a whole. The overriding belief is that the social system works or can be reformed to work. There is little criticism of the system as a whole; in the American case this means, in particular, that there is little questioning of capitalism. Instead of imminent class struggle, the early sociologists saw a future of class harmony and class cooperation. Ultimately this meant that early American sociological theory helped rationalize exploitation, domestic and international imperialism, and social inequality (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1974). In the end, the political liberalism of the early sociologists had enormously conservative implications.

### Social Change and Intellectual Currents

In their analyses of the founding of American sociological theory, Roscoe Hinkle (1980) and Ellsworth Fuhrman (1980) outlined several basic contexts from which that body of theory emerged. Of utmost importance are the social changes that occurred in American society after the Civil War (Bramson, 1961). In Chapter 1, we discussed an array of factors involved in the development of European sociological theory; several of those factors (such as industrialization and urbanization) were also intimately involved in the development of theory in America. In Fuhrman's (1980) view, the early American sociologists saw the positive possibilities of industrialization, but they also were well aware of its dangers. Although these early sociologists were attracted to the ideas generated by the labor movement and socialist groups about dealing with the dangers of industrialization, they were not in favor of radically overhauling society.

Arthur Vidich and Stanford Lyman (1985) have made a strong case for the influence of Christianity, especially Protestantism, on the founding of American sociology. American sociologists retained the Protestant interest in saving the world and merely substituted one language (science) for another (religion). "From 1854, when the first works in sociology appeared in the United States, until the outbreak of World War I, sociology was a moral and intellectual response to the problems of American life and thought, institutions, and creeds" (1). Sociologists sought to define, study, and help solve these social problems. Whereas the clergyman worked within religion to help improve it and people's lot within

it, the sociologist did the same thing within society. Given their religious roots, and the religious parallels, the vast majority of sociologists did not challenge the basic legitimacy of society.

Another major factor in the founding of American sociology discussed by both Hinkle (1980) and Fuhrman (1980) is the simultaneous emergence in America, in the late 1800s, of academic professions (including sociology) and the modern university system. In Europe, in contrast, the university system was already well established before the emergence of sociology. Although sociology had a difficult time becoming established in Europe, it had easier going in the more fluid setting of the new American university system.

Another characteristic of early American sociology (as well as other social science disciplines) was its turn away from a historical perspective and in the direction of a positivistic, or “scientific,” orientation. As Dorothy Ross (1991:473) put it, “The desire to achieve universalistic abstraction and quantitative methods turned American social scientists away from interpretive models available in history and cultural anthropology, and from the generalizing and interpretive model offered by Max Weber.” Instead of interpreting long-term historical changes, sociology had turned in the direction of scientifically studying short-term processes.

Still another factor was the impact of established European theory on American sociological theory. European theorists largely created sociological theory, and the Americans were able to rely on this groundwork. The Europeans most important to the Americans were Spencer and Comte. Georg Simmel was of some importance in the early years, but the influence of Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx was not to have a dramatic effect for a number of years. The history of Spencer’s ideas provides an interesting and informative illustration of the impact of early European theory on American sociology.

### Herbert Spencer’s Influence on Sociology

Why were Spencer’s ideas so much more influential in the early years of American sociology than those of Comte, Durkheim, Marx, and Weber? Richard Hofstadter (1959) offered several explanations. To take the easiest first, Spencer wrote in English, whereas the others did not. In addition, Spencer wrote in non-technical terms, making his work broadly accessible. Indeed, some have argued that the lack of technicality is traceable to Spencer’s not being a very sophisticated scholar. But there are other, more important reasons for Spencer’s broad appeal. He offered a scientific orientation that was attractive to an audience that was becoming enamored of science and its technological products. He offered a comprehensive theory that seemed to deal with the entire sweep of human history. The breadth of his ideas, as well as the voluminous work he produced, allowed his theory to be many different things to many different people. Finally, and perhaps most important, his theory was soothing and reassuring to a society undergoing the wrenching process of industrialization—society was, according to Spencer, steadily moving in the direction of greater and greater progress.

Spencer’s most famous American disciple was William Graham Sumner, who accepted and expanded upon many of Spencer’s Social Darwinist ideas. Spencer also influenced other early American sociologists, among them Lester Ward, Charles Horton Cooley, E. A. Ross, and Robert Park.

By the 1930s, however, Spencer was in eclipse in the intellectual world in general, as well as in sociology. His Social Darwinist, laissez-faire ideas seemed ridiculous in the light of massive social problems, a world war, and a major

economic depression. In 1937, Talcott Parsons announced Spencer's intellectual death for sociology when he echoed the historian Crane Brinton's words of a few years earlier, "Who now reads Spencer?" Today Spencer is of little more than historical interest, but his ideas *were* important in shaping early American sociological theory. Let us look briefly at the work of two American theorists who were influenced, at least in part, by Spencer's work.

*William Graham Sumner (1840–1910).* William Graham Sumner taught the first course in the United States that could be called sociology (Delaney, 2005b). Sumner contended that he had begun teaching sociology "years before any such attempt was made at any other university in the world" (Curtis, 1981:63).

Sumner was the major exponent of Social Darwinism in the United States, although he appeared to change his view late in life (Delaney, 2005b; Dickens, 2005; N. Smith, 1979; Weiler, 2007a, 2007b). The following exchange between Sumner and one of his students illustrates his "liberal" views on the need for individual freedom and his position against government interference:

"Professor, don't you believe in any government aid to industries?"

"No! It's root, hog, or die."

"Yes, but hasn't the hog got a right to root?"

"There are no rights. The world owes nobody a living."

"You believe then, Professor, in only one system, the contract-competitive system?"

"That's the only sound economic system. All others are fallacies."

"Well, suppose some professor of political economy came along and took your job away from you. Wouldn't you be sore?"

"Any other professor is welcome to try. If he gets my job, it is my fault. My business is to teach the subject so well that no one can take the job away from me."

(Phelps, cited in Hofstadter, 1959:54)

Sumner basically adopted a survival-of-the-fittest approach to the social world. Like Spencer, he saw people struggling against their environment, and the fittest were those who would be successful. Thus, Sumner was a supporter of human aggressiveness and competitiveness. Those who succeeded deserved it, and those who did not succeed deserved to fail. Again like Spencer, Sumner was opposed to efforts, especially government efforts, to aid those who had failed. In his view such intervention operated against the natural selection that, among people as among lower animals, allowed the fit to survive and the unfit to perish. As Sumner put it, "If we do not like the survival of the fittest, we have only one possible alternative, and that is survival of the unfittest" (Curtis, 1981:84). This theoretical system fit in well with the development of capitalism because it provided theoretical legitimacy for the existence of great differences in wealth and power.

Sumner is of little more than historical interest for two main reasons. First, his orientation and Social Darwinism in general have come to be regarded as little more than a crude legitimization of competitive capitalism and the status

quo. Second, he failed to establish a solid enough base at Yale to build a school of sociology with many disciples. That kind of success was to occur some years later at the University of Chicago (Heyl and Heyl, 1976). In spite of success in his time, “Sumner is remembered by few today” (Curtis, 1981:146).

*Lester F. Ward (1841–1913).* Lester Ward had an unusual career in that he spent most of it as a paleontologist working for the federal government. During that time, Ward read Spencer and Comte and developed a strong interest in sociology. He published a number of works in the late 1800s and early 1900s in which he expounded his sociological theory. As a result of the fame that this work achieved, in 1906 Ward was elected the first president of the American Sociological Society. It was only then that he took his first academic position, at Brown University, a position that he held until his death (M. Hill, 2007).

Ward, like Sumner, accepted the idea that people had evolved from lower forms to their present status. He believed that early society was characterized by its simplicity and its moral poverty, whereas modern society was more complex, was happier, and offered greater freedom. One task of sociology, *pure sociology*, was to study the basic laws of social change and social structure. But Ward was not content simply to have sociologists study social life. He believed that sociology should have a practical side; there should also be an *applied sociology*. This applied sociology involved the conscious use of scientific knowledge to attain a better society. Thus, Ward was not an extreme Social Darwinist; he believed in the need for and importance of social reform.

Although of historical importance, Sumner and Ward have not been of long-term significance to sociological theory. However, now we turn, first briefly to a theorist of the time, Thorstein Veblen, who has been of long-term significance and whose influence today in sociology is increasing. Then we look at a group of theorists, especially George Herbert Mead, and a school, the Chicago school, that came to dominate sociology in America. The Chicago school was unusual in the history of sociology in that it was one of the few (the Durkheimian school in Paris was another) “collective intellectual enterprises of an integrated kind” in the history of sociology (Bulmer, 1984:1). The tradition begun at the University of Chicago is of continuing importance to sociology and its theoretical (and empirical) status.

### Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929)

Veblen, who was not a sociologist but mainly held positions in economics departments (and even in economics was a marginal figure), nonetheless produced a body of social theory that is of enduring significance to those in a number of disciplines, including sociology (K. McCormick, 2011; Powers, 2005). The central problem for Veblen was the clash between “business” and “industry.” By business, Veblen meant the owners, leaders, and “captains” of industry who focused on the profits of their own companies but, to keep prices and profits high, often engaged in efforts to limit production. In so doing they obstructed the operation of the industrial system and adversely affected society as a whole (e.g., through higher rates of unemployment), which is best served by the unimpeded operation of industry. Thus, business leaders were the source of many problems within society, which, Veblen felt, should be led by people (e.g., engineers) who understood the industrial system and its operation and were interested in the general welfare.

Most of Veblen’s importance today is traceable to his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899/1994; Varul, 2007). Veblen was critical of the leisure class

(which is closely tied to business) for its role in fostering wasteful consumption. To impress the rest of society, the leisure class engages in both “conspicuous leisure” (the nonproductive use of time) and “conspicuous consumption” (spending more money on goods than they are worth). People in all other social classes are influenced by this example and seek, directly and indirectly, to emulate the leisure class. The result is a society characterized by the waste of time and money. What is of utmost importance about this work is that unlike most other sociological works of the time (as well as most of Veblen’s other works), *The Theory of the Leisure Class* focuses on consumption rather than production. Thus, it anticipated the current shift in social theory away from a focus on production and toward a focus on consumption (Andrews, 2019; Ritzer, 2010; Ritzer, Goodman, and Wiedenhof, 2001; Slater, 1997; also a journal—*Journal of Consumer Culture*—began publication in 2001).

### Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950)

Like Veblen, Joseph Schumpeter was an economist, not a sociologist, but he has come to be seen as a significant figure in sociology, especially economic sociology (Dahms, 2011; Swedberg, 1991a, 1991b). He is best known for his work on the nature of capitalism, especially the process of “creative destruction” that, in his view, lies at the heart of the capitalist system (Schumpeter, 1976). Creation, or innovation, is central to capitalism, but it cannot occur without the destruction of older or out-of-date elements that could impede the new ones or the capitalist system more generally. This is a dynamic theory of capitalism and exists as part of Schumpeter’s highly dynamic economic theory. He contrasted his approach to the more static theories (e.g., supply and demand) that he saw as dominant in the field of economics and of which he was highly critical.

### The Chicago School

The Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago was founded in 1892 by Albion Small (J. Williams, 2007). Small’s intellectual work is of less contemporary significance than is the key role he played in the institutionalization of sociology in the United States (Faris, 1970; Matthews, 1977). He was instrumental in creating a department at Chicago that was to become the center of the discipline in the United States for many years.<sup>1</sup> Small collaborated on the first textbook in sociology in 1894. In 1895 he founded the *American Journal of Sociology*, a journal that to this day is a dominant force in the discipline. In 1905 Small cofounded the American Sociological Society, the major professional association of American sociologists to this day (Rhoades, 1981). (The embarrassment caused by the initials of the American Sociological Society, ASS, led to a name change in 1959 to the American Sociological Association—ASA.)

### Early Chicago Sociology

The early Chicago department had several distinctive characteristics. For one thing, it had a strong connection with religion. Some members were ministers,

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<sup>1</sup> See Bulmer (1985) for a discussion of what defines a school and why we can speak of the “Chicago school.” Tiryakian (1979, 1986) also deals with schools in general, and the Chicago school in particular, and emphasizes the role played by charismatic leaders as well as methodological innovations. For a discussion of this school within the broader context of developments in American sociological theory, see Hinkle (1994).

and others were sons of ministers. Small, for example, believed that “the ultimate goal of sociology must be essentially Christian” (Matthews, 1977:95). This opinion led to a view that sociology must be interested in social reform, and this view was combined with a belief that sociology should be scientific.<sup>2</sup> Scientific sociology with an objective of social amelioration was to be practiced in the burgeoning city of Chicago, which was beset by the positive and negative effects of urbanization and industrialization.

*W. I. Thomas (1863–1947).* In 1895, W. I. Thomas became a fellow at the Chicago department, where he wrote his dissertation in 1896 (T. McCarthy, 2005). Thomas’s lasting significance was in his emphasis on the need to do scientific research on sociological issues (Lodge, 1986). Although he championed this position for many years, its major statement came in 1918 with the publication of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, which Thomas coauthored with Florian Znaniecki (Halas, 2005; Stebbins, 2007a, 2007b; Wiley, 2007). Martin Bulmer (1984:45) saw it as a landmark study because it moved sociology away from “abstract theory and library research and toward the study of the empirical world utilizing a theoretical framework.” Norbert Wiley (1986:20) viewed *The Polish Peasant* as crucial to the founding of sociology in the sense of “clarifying the unique intellectual space into which this discipline alone could see and explore.” The book was the product of eight years of research in both Europe and the United States and was primarily a study of social disorganization among Polish migrants. The data were of little lasting importance. However, the methodology was significant. It involved a variety of data sources, including autobiographical material, paid writings, family letters, newspaper files, public documents, and institutional letters.

Although *The Polish Peasant* was primarily a macrosociological study of social institutions, over the course of his career Thomas gravitated toward a microscopic, social psychological orientation. He is best known for the following social-psychological statement (made in a book coauthored by Dorothy Thomas): “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (W. Thomas and Thomas, 1928:572). The emphasis was on the importance of what people think and how this affects what they do. This microscopic, social-psychological focus stood in contrast to the macroscopic, social-structural and social-cultural perspectives of such European scholars as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim. It was to become one of the defining characteristics of Chicago’s theoretical product, symbolic interactionism (Rock, 1979:5).

*Robert Park (1864–1944).* Another figure of significance at Chicago was Robert Park (Shils, 1996). Park had come to Chicago as a part-time instructor in 1914 and quickly worked his way into a central role in the department. Park’s importance in the development of sociology lay in several areas. First, he became the dominant figure in the Chicago department, which, in turn, dominated sociology into the 1930s. Second, Park had studied in Europe and was instrumental in bringing continental European thinkers to the attention of Chicago sociologists. Park had taken courses with Simmel, and Simmel’s ideas, particularly his focus on action and interaction, were instrumental in the development of the Chicago school’s theoretical orientation (Rock, 1979:36–48). Third, prior to becoming a sociologist, Park had been a reporter, and that experience gave him a sense of the importance of urban problems and of the need to go out into the field to collect data through personal observation (Lindner, 1996; Strauss, 1996).

<sup>2</sup>As we will see, however, the Chicago school’s conception of science was to become too “soft,” at least in the eyes of the positivists who later came to dominate sociology.

Out of this emerged the Chicago school's substantive interest in urban ecology (Gaziano, 1996; Maines, Bridger, and Ulmer, 1996; Perry, Abbott, and Hutter, 1997). Fourth, Park played a key role in guiding graduate students and helping develop "a cumulative program of graduate research" (Bulmer, 1984:13). Finally, in 1921, Park and Ernest W. Burgess published the first truly important sociology textbook, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. It was to be an influential book for many years and was particularly notable for its commitments to science, research, and the study of a wide range of social phenomena.

Beginning in the late 1920s and early 1930s, Park began to spend less time in Chicago. Finally, his lifelong interest in race relations (he had been secretary to Booker T. Washington before becoming a sociologist) led him to take a position at Fisk University (a black university) in 1934. Although the decline of the Chicago department was not caused solely or even chiefly by Park's departure, its status began to wane in the 1930s. But before we can deal with the decline of Chicago sociology and the rise of other departments and theories, we need to return to the early days of the school and the two figures whose work was to be of the most lasting theoretical significance—Charles Horton Cooley and, most important, George Herbert Mead.<sup>3</sup>

*Charles Horton Cooley (1864–1929)*. The association of Cooley with the Chicago school is interesting in that he spent his career at the University of Michigan. But Cooley's theoretical perspective was in line with the theory of symbolic interactionism that was to become Chicago's most important product (Jacobs, 2006, 2009; Ruiz-Junco and Brossard, 2018; Sandstrom and Kleinman, 2005; Schubert, 2005, 2007).

Cooley received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan in 1894. He had developed a strong interest in sociology, but there was as yet no sociology department at Michigan. As a result, the questions for his Ph.D. examination came from Columbia University, where sociology had been taught since 1889 under the leadership of Franklin Giddings. Cooley began his teaching career at Michigan in 1892 before completing his doctorate.

Although Cooley theorized about large-scale phenomena such as social classes, social structures, and social institutions, he is remembered today mainly for his insights into the social-psychological aspects of social life (Schubert, 2005, 2007), though recent research has sought to demonstrate his contributions to areas such as cultural sociology and the study of consciousness (Ruiz-Junco and Brossard, 2018). His work in this area is in line with that of George Herbert Mead, although Mead was to have a deeper and more lasting effect on sociology than Cooley had. Cooley had an interest in consciousness, but he refused (as did Mead) to separate consciousness from the social context. This is best exemplified by a concept of his that survives to this day: the looking-glass self. By this concept, Cooley understood that people possess consciousness and that it is shaped in continuing social interaction.

A second basic concept that illustrates Cooley's social-psychological interests, and is also of continuing interest and importance, is that of the primary group. Primary groups are intimate, face-to-face groups that play a key role in linking the actor to the larger society. Especially crucial are the primary groups of the young—mainly the family and the peer group. Within these groups, the individual grows into a social being. It is basically within the primary group that the

<sup>3</sup>There were many other significant figures associated with the Chicago school, including Everett Hughes (Chapoulie, 1996; Strauss, 1996).

## ROBERT PARK

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH



Bettmann/Bettmann/Getty Images

Robert Park did not follow the typical career route of an academic sociologist—college, graduate school, professorship. Instead, he had a varied career before he became a sociologist late in life. Despite his late

start, Park had a profound effect on sociology in general and on theory in particular. Park's varied experiences gave him an unusual orientation to life, and this view helped shape the Chicago school, symbolic interactionism, and, ultimately, a good portion of sociology.

Park was born in Harveyville, Pennsylvania, on February 14, 1864 (Matthews, 1977). As a student at the University of Michigan, he was exposed to a number of great thinkers, such as John Dewey. Although he was excited by ideas, Park felt a strong need to work in the real world. As Park (1927/1973:253) said, "I made up my mind to go in for experience for its own sake, to gather into my soul . . . 'all the joys and sorrows of the world.'" Upon graduation, he began a career as a journalist, which gave him this real-world opportunity. He particularly liked to explore ("hunting down gambling houses and opium dens" [254]). He wrote about city life in vivid detail. He would go into the field, observe and analyze, and then write up his observations. In fact, he was already doing essentially the kind of research ("scientific reporting") that came to be one of the hallmarks of Chicago sociology—that is, urban ethnology using participant observation techniques (Lindner, 1996).

Although the accurate description of social life remained one of his passions, Park grew dissatisfied with newspaper work because it did not fulfill his familial or, more important, his intellectual needs. Furthermore, it did not seem to contribute to the improvement of the world, and Park had a deep interest in social reform. In 1898, at age thirty-four, Park left newspaper work and enrolled in the philosophy department at Harvard. He remained there for a year but then decided to move to Germany, at

that time the heart of the world's intellectual life. In Berlin he encountered Georg Simmel, whose work was to have a profound influence on Park's sociology. In fact, Simmel's lectures were the only formal sociological training that Park received. As Park (1927/1973:257) said, "I got most of my knowledge about society and human nature from my own observations." In 1904, Park completed his doctoral dissertation at the University of Heidelberg. Characteristically, he was dissatisfied with his dissertation: "All I had to show was that little book and I was ashamed of it" (Matthews, 1977:57). He refused a summer teaching job at the University of Chicago and turned away from academe as he had earlier turned away from newspaper work.

His need to contribute to social betterment led him to become secretary and chief publicity officer for the Congo Reform Association, which was set up to help alleviate the brutality and exploitation then taking place in the Belgian Congo. During this period, he met Booker T. Washington, and he was attracted to the cause of improving the lot of black Americans. He became Washington's secretary and played a key role in the activities of the Tuskegee Institute. In 1912 he met W. I. Thomas, the Chicago sociologist, who was lecturing at Tuskegee. Thomas invited him to give a course on "the Negro in America" to a small group of graduate students at Chicago, and Park did so in 1914. The course was successful, and he gave it again the next year to an audience twice as large. At this time he joined the American Sociological Society, and only a decade later he became its president. Park gradually worked his way into a full-time appointment at Chicago, although he did not get a full professorship until 1923, when he was fifty-nine years old. Over the approximately two decades that he was affiliated with the University of Chicago, he played a key role in shaping the intellectual orientation of the sociology department.

Park remained peripatetic even after his retirement from Chicago in the early 1930s. He taught courses and oversaw research at Fisk University until he was nearly eighty years old. He traveled extensively. He died on February 7, 1944, one week before his eightieth birthday.

looking-glass self emerges and that the ego-centered child learns to take others into account and, thereby, to become a contributing member of society.

Both Cooley (Winterer, 1994) and Mead rejected a behavioristic view of human beings, the view that people blindly and unconsciously respond to external stimuli. They believed that people had consciousness, a self, and that it was the responsibility of the sociologist to study this aspect of social reality. Cooley urged sociologists to try to put themselves in the place of the actors they were studying, to use the method of sympathetic introspection, in order to analyze consciousness. By analyzing what they, as actors, might do in various circumstances, sociologists could understand the meanings and motives that are at the base of social behavior. The method of sympathetic introspection seemed, to many, to be very unscientific. In this area, among others, Mead's work represents an advance over Cooley's. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of similarity in the interests of the two men, not the least of which is their shared view that sociology should focus on such social-psychological phenomena as consciousness, action, and interaction.

*George Herbert Mead (1863–1931).* The most important thinker associated with the Chicago school and symbolic interactionism was not a sociologist but a philosopher, George Herbert Mead.<sup>4</sup> Mead started teaching philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1894, and he taught there until his death in 1931 (Chriss, 2005b; G. Cook, 1993). He is something of a paradox, given his central importance in the history of sociological theory, both because he taught philosophy, not sociology, and because he published comparatively little during his lifetime. The paradox is, in part, resolved by two facts. First, Mead taught courses in social psychology in the philosophy department, and they were taken by many graduate students in sociology. His ideas had a profound effect on a number of them. These students combined Mead's ideas with those they were getting in the sociology department from people such as Park and Thomas. Although at the time there was no theory known as symbolic interactionism, it was created by students out of these various inputs. Thus Mead had a deep, personal impact on the people who were later to develop symbolic interactionism. Second, these students put together their notes on Mead's courses and published a posthumous volume under his name. The work, *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead, 1934/1962), moved his ideas from the realm of oral to that of written tradition. Widely read to this day, this volume forms the main intellectual pillar of symbolic interactionism.

We deal with Mead's ideas in Chapter 15, but it is necessary at this point to underscore a few points in order to situate him historically. Mead's ideas need to be seen in the context of psychological behaviorism. Mead was quite favorably impressed with this orientation and accepted many of its tenets. He adopted its focus on the actor and his behavior. He regarded as sensible the behaviorists' concern with the rewards and costs involved in the behaviors of the actors. What troubled Mead was that behaviorism did not seem to go far enough. That is, it excluded consciousness from serious consideration, arguing that it was not amenable to scientific study. Mead vehemently disagreed and sought to extend the principles of behaviorism to an analysis of the mind. In so doing, Mead enunciated a focus similar to that of Cooley. But whereas Cooley's position seemed unscientific, Mead promised a more scientific conception of consciousness by extending the highly scientific principles and methods of psychological behaviorism.

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<sup>4</sup>For a dissenting view, see J. Lewis and Smith (1980).

Mead offered American sociology a social-psychological theory that stood in stark contrast to the primarily societal theories offered by most of the major European theorists (Shalin, 2011). The most important exception was Simmel. Thus, symbolic interactionism was developed, in large part, out of Simmel's (Low, 2008) interest in action and interaction and Mead's interest in consciousness. However, such a focus led to a weakness in Mead's work, as well as in symbolic interactionism in general, at the societal and cultural levels.

### The Waning of Chicago Sociology

Chicago sociology reached its peak in the 1920s, but by the 1930s, with the death of Mead and the departure of Park, the department had begun to lose its position of central importance in American sociology (Cortese, 1995). Fred Matthews (1977; see also Bulmer, 1984) pinpointed several reasons for the decline of Chicago sociology, two of which seem of utmost importance.

First, the discipline had grown increasingly preoccupied with being scientific—that is, using sophisticated methods and employing statistical analysis. However, the Chicago school was viewed as emphasizing descriptive, ethnographic studies (Prus, 1996), often focusing on their subjects' personal orientations (in Thomas's terms, their "definitions of the situation"). Park progressively came to despise statistics (he called it "parlor magic") because it seemed to prohibit the analysis of subjectivity, the idiosyncratic, and the peculiar. The fact that important work in quantitative methods was done at Chicago (Bulmer, 1984:151–189) tended to be ignored in the face of its overwhelming association with qualitative methods.

Second, more and more individuals outside Chicago grew increasingly resentful of Chicago's dominance of both the American Sociological Society and the *American Journal of Sociology*. The Eastern Sociological Society was founded in 1930, and eastern sociologists became more vocal about the dominance of the Midwest in general and Chicago in particular (Wiley, 1979:63). By 1935, the revolt against Chicago had led to a non-Chicago secretary of the association and the establishment of a new official journal, the *American Sociological Review* (Lengermann, 1979). According to Wiley (1979:63), "the Chicago school had fallen like a mighty oak." This signaled the growth of other power centers, most notably Harvard and the Ivy League in general. Symbolic interactionism was largely an indeterminate, oral tradition and as such eventually lost ground to more explicit and codified theoretical systems such as the structural functionalism associated with the Ivy League (Rock, 1979:12).

Though it would never again be the center of American sociology, the Chicago school remained a force into the 1950s. Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) was a significant figure in the department until his departure for Berkeley in 1952 (Blumer, 1969; Maines, 2005). He was a major exponent of the theoretical approach developed at Chicago out of the work of Mead, Cooley, Simmel, Park, Thomas, and others. In fact, it was Blumer who coined the term *symbolic interactionism* in 1937. Blumer played a key role in keeping this tradition alive through his teaching at Chicago and wrote a number of essays that were instrumental in keeping symbolic interactionism vital into the 1950s. Whatever the state of the Chicago school, the Chicago tradition has remained alive to this day, with major exponents dispersed throughout the country and the world (Sandstrom, Martin, and Fine, 2001).

## Women in Early American Sociology

Simultaneously with the developments at the University of Chicago, even sometimes in concert with them, and at the same time that Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel were creating a European sociology, and sometimes in concert with them as well, a group of women who formed a broad and surprisingly connected network of social reformers were also developing pioneering sociological theories. These women included Jane Addams (1860–1935), Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935), Anna Julia Cooper (1858–1964), Ida Wells-Barnett (1862–1931), Marianne Weber (1870–1954), and Beatrice Potter Webb (1858–1943).<sup>5</sup> With the possible exception of Cooper, they can all be connected through their relationship to Jane Addams. That they are not today well known or recognized in conventional histories of the discipline as sociologists or sociological theorists is a chilling testimony to the power of gender politics within the discipline of sociology and to sociology's essentially unreflective and uncritical interpretation of its own practices. Although the sociological theory of each of these women is a product of individual theoretical effort, when they are read collectively, they represent a coherent and complementary statement of early feminist sociological theory.

The chief hallmarks of their theories, hallmarks that may in part account for their being passed over in the development of professional sociology, include (1) an emphasis on women's experience and women's lives and works being equal in importance to men's; (2) an awareness that they spoke from a situated and embodied standpoint and therefore, for the most part, not with the tone of imperious objectivity that male sociological theory would come to associate with authoritative theory making (Lemert, 2000); (3) the idea that the purpose of sociology and sociological theory is social reform—that is, the end is to improve people's lives through knowledge; and (4) the claim that the chief problem for amelioration in their time was inequality. What distinguishes these early women most from each other is the nature of and the remedy for the inequality on which they focused—gender, race, or class, or the intersection of these factors. But all these women translated their views into social and political activism that helped shape and change the North Atlantic societies in which they lived, and this activism was as much a part of their sense of practicing sociology as creating theory was. They believed in social science research as part of both their theoretical and their activist enactments of sociology and were highly creative innovators of social science method.

*Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860–1935).* Among these early women sociologists, Charlotte Perkins Gilman offered the most comprehensive theoretical statement. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, Gilman was a member of the famous Beecher family. Although Gilman did not have a university position, she worked as a writer and public speaker, a calling for which she was in high demand. She published in a variety of forms, among them newspaper articles, fictional works, academic journal articles (including essays in the *American Journal of Sociology*), and academic books. Her most comprehensive theoretical statement was *Women and Economics* (1898/1966). In size, scope, and theoretical vision the book is equivalent to those published by her male

<sup>5</sup> Addams, Gilman, Cooper, and Wells-Barnett were American. Weber was German and Potter was British.

contemporaries. In *Women and Economics*, Gilman drew on evolutionary theory, specifically the ideas of Lester Ward. She described the evolution of what she called the “sexuo-economic relation,” and in particular, how modern society distorts basic human needs. Both women and men, she said, desire to be engaged in creative, independent work. However, women are trapped in domestic enslavement. They are required to work in service of male interests. The denial of the creative aspect of their being causes great suffering for women. Gilman believed that by using the tools of sociology, humans now had the capacity to overcome these gender inequalities. Informed by her theoretical ideas, she worked toward the establishment of a gender equitable social order. For these reasons, she was hailed, not only in the United States, but around the world, as one of the most important feminists of her time. These theories were also explored in popular fictional works such as *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892/1973) and *Herland* (1915/1998). Although many of Gilman’s ideas about evolution are now outdated (as are those of Spencer and the early American male sociologists), her incisive analysis of gender inequality, grounded in both economy and culture, remains strikingly relevant.

### The Du Bois-Atlanta School

At the same time that Small was developing the Chicago school and Gilman was writing *Women and Economics*, African American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois was building what Aldon Morris (2015) calls the Du Bois-Atlanta school of sociology. Du Bois had studied with the most prestigious social scientists in Germany and had received a Ph.D. from Harvard. In 1897 he spent a year at the University of Pennsylvania, during which time he researched his most important empirical work, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899/1996). That same year, Du Bois moved to Atlanta to teach history and economics. In the thirteen years that he was at Atlanta University, he founded a sociology department, led the first American scientific sociological laboratory, and wrote one of his most remembered works, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/1996; A. Morris, 2015). In contrast to his empirical work, *The Souls of Black Folk* introduced a new style of sociological writing. It combined empirical data with poetic, autobiographical reflection and historical analysis.

The Du Bois-Atlanta school was dedicated to the study of black urban life. A. Morris (2015:58) described its mission like this: “sociological and economic factors were hypothesized to be the main causes of racial inequality that relegated black people to the bottom of the social order.” The school, reflecting Du Bois’s own approach to scholarship, relied upon “multiple research methods,” including fieldwork of the kind pioneered in *The Philadelphia Negro* (61). Black students from across the United States came to Atlanta to study with Du Bois and to learn about his empirical social science. They believed that sociological research could be used to combat racial inequality, discrimination, and violence.

Du Bois was a striking and important figure in the development of Atlanta sociology. However, he was not alone in this endeavor. The Du Bois-Atlanta school was a *school* precisely because it brought together like-minded people engaged in research on a common set of problems. Before Du Bois arrived in Atlanta, Richard Wright Sr. had already initiated a “sociological orientation . . . that aligned with the new discipline” (A. Morris, 2015:61). Other members of this “first generation of black sociologists” included Monroe Work, Richard Wright Jr., and George Edmund Haynes (62). A central component to the work of the Atlanta school was the Atlanta annual conference. This meeting brought

together black students, academics, and community members to share data and to launch new research studies. The conferences also attracted influential white scholars such as Jane Addams and anthropologist Franz Boas.

Despite his success, Du Bois resigned from Atlanta University in 1910 to take up more explicitly political work. Already in 1905 he had worked with Monroe Trotter to form the Niagara Movement, a civil rights organization dedicated to the critique of racial discrimination. In 1909 he helped to found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and later became editor for the NAACP's magazine, *The Crisis*. In *The Crisis*, Du Bois wrote editorials that addressed problems faced by African Americans in the United States.

Throughout this varied career, Du Bois's overarching interest was in the "race idea," which he considered "the central thought of all history" (Du Bois, 1897/1995:21), and the "color-line," which he saw as drawn across not only the United States but across much of the world. One of his best-known theoretical ideas is the veil, which creates a clear separation, or barrier, between African Americans and whites. The imagery is not of a wall but rather of a thin, porous material through which each race can see the other but which nonetheless serves to separate the races. Another key theoretical idea is double consciousness, a sense of "two-ness," or a feeling among African Americans of seeing and measuring themselves through others' eyes. Although, during his lifetime, Du Bois's work was ignored by the sociological mainstream, it is now clear that he offers both an important sociological theory of race and a unique approach to sociology more generally.

## Sociological Theory to Midcentury

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### The Rise of Harvard, the Ivy League, and Structural Functionalism

We can trace the rise of sociology at Harvard from the arrival of Pitirim Sorokin in 1930 (Avino, 2006; Jeffries, 2005; Johnston, 1995). When Sorokin arrived at Harvard, there was no sociology department, but by the end of his first year one had been organized, and he had been appointed its head. Sorokin was a sociological theorist and continued to publish into the 1960s, but his work is surprisingly little cited today. Although some disagree (e.g., Tiryakian, 2007), the dominant view is that his theorizing has not stood the test of time very well. Sorokin's long-term significance may well have been in the creation of the Harvard sociology department and the hiring of Talcott Parsons (who had been an instructor of economics at Harvard) for the position of instructor in sociology. Parsons became *the* dominant figure in American sociology for introducing European theorists to an American audience, for his own sociological theories, and for his many students who became major sociological theorists.

#### Talcott Parsons (1902–1979)

Although Parsons published some early essays, his major contribution in the early years was his influence on graduate students, many of whom became notable sociological theorists themselves. The most famous was Robert Merton, who received his Ph.D. in 1936 and soon became a major theorist and the heart of Parsonsian-style theorizing at Columbia University. In the same year (1936), Kingsley Davis received his Ph.D., and he, along with Wilbert Moore (who received his Harvard degree in 1940), wrote one of the central works in

structural-functional theory, the theory that was to become the major product of Parsons and the Parsonsians. But Parsons's influence was not restricted to the 1930s. Remarkably, he produced graduate students of great influence well into the 1960s.

The pivotal year for Parsons and for American sociological theory was 1937, the year in which he published *The Structure of Social Action*. This book was of significance to sociological theory in America for four main reasons. First, it served to introduce grand European theorizing to a large American audience. The bulk of the book was devoted to Durkheim, Weber, and Pareto. His interpretations of these theorists shaped their images in American sociology for many years. Second, Parsons devoted almost no attention to Marx or to Simmel (D. Levine, 1991a). As a result, Marxian theory continued to be largely excluded from legitimate sociology.

Third, *The Structure of Social Action* made the case for sociological theorizing as a legitimate and significant sociological activity. The theorizing that has taken place in the United States since then owes a deep debt to Parsons's work (Lidz, 2011).

Finally, Parsons argued for specific sociological theories that were to have a profound influence on sociology. At first, Parsons was thought of, and thought of himself, as an action theorist (Joas, 1996). He seemed to focus on actors and their thoughts and actions. But by the close of his 1937 work and increasingly in his later work, Parsons sounded more like a structural-functional theorist focusing on large-scale social and cultural systems. Although Parsons argued that there was no contradiction between these theories, he became best known as a structural functionalist, and he was the primary exponent of this theory, which gained dominance within sociology and maintained that position until the 1960s. Parsons's theoretical strength, and that of structural functionalism, lay in delineating the relationships among large-scale social structures and institutions.

Parsons's major statements on his structural-functional theory came in the early 1950s in several works, most notably *The Social System* (1951) (B. Barber, 1994). In that work and others, Parsons tended to concentrate on the structures of society and their relationship to each other. Those structures were seen as mutually supportive and tending toward a dynamic equilibrium. The emphasis was on how order was maintained among the various elements of society (Wrong, 1994). Change was seen as an orderly process, and Parsons (1966, 1971) ultimately came to adopt a neoevolutionary view of social change. Parsons was concerned not only with the social system per se but also with its relationship to the other action systems, especially the cultural and personality systems. But his basic view on intersystemic relations was essentially the same as his view of intrasystemic relations; that is, they were defined by cohesion, consensus, and order. In other words, the various social structures performed a variety of positive functions for each other.

It is clear, then, why Parsons came to be defined primarily as a structural functionalist. As his fame grew, so did the strength of structural-functional theory in the United States. His work lay at the core of this theory, but his students and disciples also concentrated on extending both the theory and its dominance in the United States.

Although Parsons played a number of important and positive roles in the history of sociological theory in the United States, his work also had negative consequences (Holton, 2001). First, he offered interpretations of

European theorists that seemed to reflect his own theoretical orientation more than theirs. Many American sociologists were initially exposed to erroneous interpretations of the European masters. Second, as already pointed out, early in his career Parsons largely ignored Marx, which resulted in Marx's ideas being on the periphery of sociology for many years. Third, his own theory as it developed over the years had a number of serious weaknesses. However, Parsons's preeminence in American sociology served for many years to mute or overwhelm the critics. Not until much later did the weaknesses of Parsons's theory, and of structural functionalism in general, receive a full airing.

But returning to the early 1930s and other developments at Harvard, we can gain a good deal of insight into the development of the Harvard department by looking at it through an account of its other major figure, George Homans.

### George Homans (1910–1989)

A wealthy Bostonian, George Homans received his bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1932 (Homans, 1962, 1984; see also Bell, 1992). As a result of the Great Depression, he was unemployed but certainly not penniless. In the fall of 1932, L. J. Henderson, a physiologist, was offering a course in the theories of Vilfredo Pareto, and Homans was invited to attend; he accepted. (Parsons also attended the Pareto seminars.) Homans's description of why he was drawn to and taken with Pareto says much about why American sociological theory was so highly conservative, so anti-Marxist:

I took to Pareto because he made clear to me what I was already prepared to believe. . . . Someone has said that much modern sociology is an effort to answer the arguments of the revolutionaries. As a Republican Bostonian who had not rejected his comparatively wealthy family, I felt during the thirties that I was under personal attack, above all from the Marxists. I was ready to believe Pareto because he provided me with a defense. (Homans, 1962:4)

Homans's exposure to Pareto led to a book, *An Introduction to Pareto* (coauthored with Charles Curtis), published in 1934. The publication of this book made Homans a sociologist even though Pareto's work was virtually the only sociology he had read up to that point.

In 1934, Homans was named a junior fellow at Harvard, a program started to avoid the problems associated with the Ph.D. program. In fact, Homans never did earn a Ph.D., even though he became one of the major sociological figures of his day. Homans was a junior fellow until 1939, and in those years he absorbed more and more sociology. In 1939, Homans was affiliated with the sociology department, but the connection was broken by World War II.

By the time Homans returned from the war, the Department of Social Relations had been founded by Parsons at Harvard, and Homans joined it. Although Homans respected some aspects of Parsons's work, he was highly critical of Parsons's style of theorizing. A long-running exchange began between the two men that later manifested itself publicly in the pages of many books and journals. Basically, Homans argued that Parsons's theory was not a theory at all but rather a vast system of intellectual categories into which most aspects of the social world fit. Further, Homans believed that theory should be built

from the ground up on the basis of careful observations of the social world. Parsons's theory, however, started on the general theoretical level and worked its way down to the empirical level.

In his own work, Homans amassed a large number of empirical observations over the years, but it was only in the 1950s that he hit upon a satisfactory theoretical approach with which to analyze those data. That theory was psychological behaviorism, as it was best expressed in the ideas of his colleague at Harvard, the psychologist B. F. Skinner. On the basis of this perspective, Homans developed his exchange theory. We pick up the story of this theoretical development later in this chapter.

## Developments in Marxian Theory

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

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

One major exponent of this point of view was Georg Lukács (Fischer, 1984; Markus, 2005). According to Martin Jay (1984:84), Lukács was "the founding father of Western Marxism" and his work *Class and Class Consciousness* is "generally acknowledged as the charter document of Hegelian Marxism." Lukács had begun in the early 1900s to integrate Marxism with sociology (in particular, Weberian and Simmelian theory). Following this, Felix J. Weil had the idea to develop a school for the development of Marxian theory. The Institute of Social Research was officially founded in Frankfurt, Germany, on February 3, 1923 (Jay, 1973; Wheatland, 2009; Wiggershaus, 1994). Over the years, a number of

the most famous thinkers in Marxian theory were associated with the critical school, including Max Horkheimer (Schulz, 2007b), Theodor Adorno (Schulz, 2007a), Erich Fromm (McLaughlin, 2007), Walter Benjamin (1982/1999), Herbert Marcuse (Dandaneau, 2007a), and, more recently, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth. The institute functioned in Germany until 1934, but by then things were growing increasingly uncomfortable under the Nazi regime. The Nazis had little use for the Marxian ideas that dominated the institute, and their hostility was heightened because many of those associated with it were Jewish. In 1934 Horkheimer, as head of the institute, came to New York to discuss its status with the president of Columbia University. Much to Horkheimer's surprise, he was invited to affiliate the institute with the university, and he was even offered a building on campus. And so a center of Marxian theory moved to *the* center of the capitalist world. The institute stayed there until the end of the war, but after the war, pressure mounted to return it to Germany. In 1949 Horkheimer returned to Germany, and he took the institute with him. Although the institute moved to Germany, many of the figures associated with it took independent career directions.

It is important to underscore a few of the most important aspects of critical theory (Calhoun and Karaganis, 2001). In its early years, those associated with the institute tended to be fairly traditional Marxists, devoting a good portion of their attention to the economic domain. But around 1930, a major change took place as this group of thinkers began to shift its attention from the economy to the cultural system, especially the "culture industry" (Lash and Lury, 2007), which it came to see as the major force in modern capitalist society. This was consistent with, but an extension of, the position taken earlier by Hegelian Marxists such as Georg Lukács. To help them understand the cultural domain, the critical theorists were attracted to the work of Max Weber. The effort to combine Marx and Weber and thereby create "Weberian Marxism"<sup>6</sup> (Dahms, 1997; Lowy, 1996) gave the critical school some of its distinctive orientations and served in later years to make it more legitimate to sociologists who began to grow interested in Marxian theory.

A second major step taken by at least some members of the critical school was to employ the rigorous social-scientific techniques developed by American sociologists to research issues of interest to Marxists. This, like the adoption of Weberian theory, made the critical school more acceptable to mainstream sociologists.

Third, critical theorists made an effort to integrate individually oriented Freudian theory with the societal and cultural-level insights of Marx and Weber. This seemed, to many sociologists, to represent a more inclusive theory than that offered by either Marx or Weber alone. If nothing else, the effort to combine such disparate theories proved stimulating to sociologists and many other intellectuals.

The critical school has done much useful work since the 1920s, and a significant amount of it is of relevance to sociologists. However, the critical school had to await the late 1960s before it was "discovered" by large numbers of American theorists.

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<sup>6</sup>This label fits some critical theorists better than others, and it also applies to a wide range of other thinkers (Agger, 1998).

## HANNAH ARENDT

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Fred Stein Archive/Archive Photos/Getty Images



Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) was a mid-twentieth-century political philosopher and public intellectual. Though she was often critical of the social sciences, among sociologists, increasingly, she is studied for her

writing on topics such as totalitarianism, refugees, human rights, violence, revolution, and lying in politics (Baehr and Walsh, 2017; Bernstein, 2018).

Hannah Arendt was born an only child into a middle-class Jewish family on October 14, 1906, in Hanover, Germany. At university she studied with major German philosophers: the existentialists Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers and phenomenologist Edmund Husserl. She was also friends with critical theorist Walter Benjamin. The ideas of these philosophers, with their attention to the authenticity of lived experience, animated Arendt's writing throughout her life. In these early years, Arendt was also connected to the Zionist movement (the effort to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine), for whom she did research on "Nazi antisemitic propaganda" (Bernstein, 2018:3–4). Because of this work, in 1933 (the year that Adolf Hitler came to power) Arendt was briefly apprehended and interrogated by the Gestapo (the German secret state police). After that Arendt left Germany, spent time in Prague, Switzerland, and Paris and in 1941 arrived, finally, in New York. Thus, as Bernstein (2018) points out, Arendt experienced firsthand two phenomena central to the mid-twentieth century: the operations of a totalitarian state and the challenges of being a stateless refugee.

Arendt earned American citizenship in 1951, the same year as her influential *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951/1973) was published (Baehr and Walsh, 2017). In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt studied the rise of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. She argued that totalitarianism was a unique political form that "operate[d] according

to a system of values so radically different from all others, that none of our traditional legal, moral or common sense utilitarian categories [can] any longer help us to come to terms with, or judge or predict their course of action" (Arendt, cited in Baehr and Walsh, 2017:13). In addition to *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt published many newspaper articles, books, and essays, including *The Human Condition* (1958/1998), *Between Past and Future* (1961), and *On Revolution* (1963/1990). The sociological significance of these books is examined in Baehr and Walsh's (2017) *The Anthem Companion to Hannah Arendt*. As Baehr and Walsh (2017) point out, one of Arendt's chief complaints about sociology (Marxists and structural functionalists alike) was that it reduced the explanation of complex human phenomena to a limited set of variables and grand overarching laws. In defiance of this, Arendt kept the creativity (and unpredictability) of authentic human action at the center of all her writing.

These works aside, Arendt is probably best known for her coverage, for *The New Yorker*, of the 1961 trial of Nazi Adolf Eichmann, a key organizer of the Holocaust. Arendt's (1963/2006) analysis of the trial was published in 1963 as *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In this book, Arendt introduced the now-popular concept of the "banality of evil." Contrary to our basic idea about the nature of evil and the people who do evil, Eichmann, she said, was not a demon or devil but a normal, uninteresting, banal man who carried out, with efficiency, the job to which he had been assigned. Though, as Adler (2017) points out, Arendt's characterization of Eichmann has flaws, it has nevertheless inspired a great deal of social science scholarship on the nature of evil in modern societies.

In the United States, Arendt taught part time at universities including Princeton, Cornell, Berkeley, and Chicago. In 1967 she took a full-time appointment at the New School for Research. Despite this appointment, she remained a public intellectual, writing for a broad audience about the problems of the day, until her death, in New York, on December 4, 1975 (Baehr and Walsh, 2017).

## Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge

Brief mention should be made at this point of the work of Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) (Kettler and Meja, 1995; Loader, 2011; Ruef, 2007). Born in Hungary, Mannheim was forced to move first to Germany and later to England. He was influenced by the work of Marx on ideology, as well as that of Weber, Simmel, and the neo-Marxist Georg Lukács. Also of significance is his thinking on rationality, which tends to pick up themes developed in Weber's work on this topic but deals with them in a far more concise and a much clearer manner (Ritzer, 1998).

He is best known, however, as the founder of an area of sociology called the "sociology of knowledge," which continues to be important to this day (E. McCarthy, 1996; T. McCarthy, 2007; Stehr, 2001). Mannheim, of course, built on the work of many predecessors, most notably Karl Marx (although Mannheim was far from being a Marxist). Basically, the sociology of knowledge involves the systematic study of knowledge, ideas, or intellectual phenomena in general. To Mannheim, knowledge is determined by social existence. For example, Mannheim sought to relate the ideas of a group to that group's position in the social structure. Marx did this by relating ideas to social classes, but Mannheim extended this perspective by linking ideas to a variety of different positions within society (e.g., differences between generations).

In addition to playing a major role in creating the sociology of knowledge, Mannheim is perhaps best known for his distinction between two idea systems, ideology and utopia (B. Turner, 1995). An ideology is an idea system that seeks to conceal and conserve the present by interpreting it from the point of view of the past. A utopia, in contrast, is a system of ideas that seeks to transcend the present by focusing on the future. Conflict between ideologies and utopias is an ever-present reality in society (Mannheim, 1931/1936).

## Sociological Theory from Midcentury

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### Structural Functionalism: Peak and Decline

The 1940s and 1950s were, paradoxically, the years of greatest dominance and the beginnings of the decline of structural functionalism. In those years, Parsons produced his major statements that clearly reflected his shift from action theory to structural functionalism. Parsons's students had fanned out across the country and occupied dominant positions in many of the major sociology departments (e.g., Columbia and Cornell). These students were producing works of their own that were widely recognized contributions to structural-functional theory.

However, just as it was gaining theoretical hegemony, structural functionalism came under attack, and the attacks mounted until they reached a climax in the 1960s and 1970s. There was an attack by C. Wright Mills on Parsons in 1959, and other major criticisms were mounted by David Lockwood (1956), Alvin Gouldner (1959/1967, 1970; see also Chriss, 2005a), and Irving Horowitz (1962/1967). In the 1950s, these attacks were seen as little more than "guerrilla raids," but as sociology moved into the 1960s, the dominance of structural functionalism was clearly in jeopardy.

George Huaco (1986) linked the rise and decline of structural functionalism to the position of American society in the world order. As America rose to world dominance after 1945, structural functionalism achieved hegemony within sociology. Structural functionalism supported America's dominant position in the world in two ways. First, the structural-functional view that "every pattern has

consequences which contribute to the preservation and survival of the larger system" was "nothing less than a celebration of the United States and its world hegemony" (52). Second, the structural-functional emphasis on equilibrium (the best social change is no change) meshed well with the interests of the United States, then "the wealthiest and most powerful empire in the world." The decline of U.S. world dominance in the 1970s coincided with structural functionalism's loss of its preeminent position in sociological theory.

### Radical Sociology in America: C. Wright Mills

As we have seen, although Marxian theory was largely ignored or reviled by mainstream American sociologists, there were exceptions, the most notable of which is C. Wright Mills (1916–1962). Mills is noteworthy for his almost single-handed effort to keep a Marxian tradition alive in sociological theory. Modern Marxian sociologists have far outstripped Mills in theoretical sophistication, but they owe him a deep debt nonetheless for the personal and professional activities that helped set the stage for their own work (Alt, 1985–1986). Mills was not a Marxist, and he did not read Marx until the mid-1950s. Even then he was restricted to the few available English translations because he could not read German. Because Mills had published most of his major works by then, his work was not informed by a very sophisticated Marxian theory.

Mills published two major works that reflected his radical politics as well as his weaknesses in Marxian theory. The first was *White Collar* (1951), an acid critique of the status of a growing occupational category, white-collar workers. The second was *The Power Elite* (1956), a book that sought to show how America was dominated by a small group of businessmen, politicians, and military leaders (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, 2006). Sandwiched in between was his most theoretically sophisticated work, *Character and Social Structure* (Gerth and Mills, 1953), coauthored with Hans Gerth (N. Gerth, 1993).

Mills's radicalism put him on the periphery of American sociology. He was the object of much criticism, and he, in turn, became a severe critic of sociology. The critical attitude culminated in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). Of particular note is Mills's severe criticism of Talcott Parsons and his practice of grand theory.

Mills died in 1962, an outcast in sociology. However, before the decade was out, both radical sociology and Marxian theory (R. Levine, 2005) would begin to make important inroads into the discipline.

### The Development of Conflict Theory

Another precursor to a true union of Marxism and sociological theory was the development of a conflict-theory alternative to structural functionalism. As we have just seen, structural functionalism had no sooner gained leadership in sociological theory than it came under increasing attack. The attack was multifaceted: Structural functionalists were accused of such things as being politically conservative, unable to deal with social change because of their focus on static structures, and incapable of adequately analyzing social conflict.

One of the results of this criticism was an effort on the part of a number of sociologists to overcome the problems of structural functionalism by integrating a concern for structure with an interest in conflict. This work constituted the development of conflict theory as an alternative to structural-functional theory. Unfortunately, it often seemed little more than a mirror image of structural functionalism with little intellectual integrity of its own.

## C. WRIGHT MILLS

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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Photos/Getty Images



C. Wright Mills was born on August 28, 1916, in Waco, Texas (Dandaneau, 2007b; Domhoff, 2005; Hayden, 2006). He came from a conventional middle-class background:

His father was an insurance broker, and his mother was a housewife. He attended the University of Texas and by 1939 had obtained both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. He was an unusual student who, by the time he left Texas, already had published articles in the two major sociology journals. Mills did his doctoral work at, and received a Ph.D. from, the University of Wisconsin (Scimecca, 1977). He took his first job at the University of Maryland but spent the bulk of his career, from 1945 until his death, at Columbia University.

Mills was a man in a hurry (Horowitz, 1983). By the time he died at age forty-five from his fourth heart attack, Mills had made a number of important contributions to sociology.

One of the most striking things about C. Wright Mills was his combativeness; he seemed to be constantly at war (Form, 2007). He had a tumultuous personal life, characterized by many affairs, three marriages, and a child from each marriage. He had an equally tumultuous professional life. He seemed to have fought with and against everyone and everything. As a graduate student at Wisconsin, he took on a number of his professors. Later, in one of his early essays, he engaged in a thinly disguised critique of the ex-chairman of the Wisconsin department. He called the senior theorist at Wisconsin, Howard Becker, a "real fool" (Horowitz, 1983).

He eventually came into conflict with his coauthor, Hans Gerth, who called Mills "an excellent operator, whippersnapper, promising young man on the make, and Texas cowboy á la ride and shoot" (Horowitz, 1983:72). As a professor at Columbia, Mills was isolated and estranged from his colleagues. Said one of his Columbia colleagues,

There was no estrangement between Wright and me. We began estranged. Indeed, at the memorial services or meeting that was organized at Columbia University at his death, I seemed to be the only person who could not say: "I used to be his friend, but we became somewhat distant." It was rather the reverse. (in Horowitz, 1983:83)

Mills was an outsider, and he knew it: "I am an outlander, not only regionally, but down deep and for good" (Horowitz, 1983:84). In *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), Mills challenged not only the dominant theorist of his day, Talcott Parsons, but also the dominant methodologist, Paul Lazarsfeld, who also happened to be a colleague at Columbia.

Mills, of course, was at odds not only with people; he was also at odds with American society and challenged it on a variety of fronts. But perhaps most telling is the fact that when Mills visited the Soviet Union and was honored as a major critic of American society, he took the occasion to attack censorship in the Soviet Union with a toast to an early Soviet leader who had been purged and murdered by the Stalinists: "To the day when the complete works of Leon Trotsky are published in the Soviet Union!" (Tilman, 1984:8).

C. Wright Mills died in Nyack, New York, on March 20, 1962.

The first effort of note was Lewis Coser's (1956) book on the functions of social conflict (Delaney, 2005a; Jaworski, 1991). This work clearly tried to deal with social conflict from within the framework of a structural-functional view of the world. Although it is useful to look at the functions of conflict, there is much more to the study of conflict than an analysis of its positive functions.

The biggest problem with most of conflict theory was that it lacked what it needed most: a sound basis in Marxian theory. After all, Marxian theory was well

developed outside of sociology and should have provided a base on which to develop a sophisticated sociological theory of conflict. The one exception here is the work of Ralf Dahrendorf (1929–2009).

Dahrendorf was a European scholar who was well versed in Marxian theory. He sought to embed his conflict theory in the Marxian tradition. Dahrendorf's major work, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959), was the most influential piece in conflict theory, but that was largely because it sounded so much like structural functionalism that it was palatable to mainstream sociologists. That is, Dahrendorf operated at the same level of analysis as the structural functionalists (structures and institutions) and looked at many of the same issues. (In other words, structural functionalism and conflict theory are part of the same paradigm.) Dahrendorf recognized that although aspects of the social system could fit together rather neatly, there also could be considerable conflict and tension among them.

In the end, conflict theory should be seen as little more than a transitional development in the history of sociological theory. It failed because it did not go far enough in the direction of Marxian theory. It was still too early in the 1950s and 1960s for American sociology to accept a full-fledged Marxian approach. But conflict theory was helpful in setting the stage for the beginning of that acceptance by the late 1960s.

### The Birth of Exchange Theory

Another important theoretical development in the 1950s was the rise of exchange theory (Molm, 2001). The major figure in this development is George Homans, a sociologist whom we left earlier, just as he was being drawn to B. F. Skinner's psychological behaviorism. Skinner's behaviorism is a major source of Homans's, and sociology's, exchange theory.

At first, Homans did not see how Skinner's propositions, developed to help explain the behavior of pigeons, might be useful for understanding human social behavior. But as Homans looked further at data from sociological studies of small groups and anthropological studies of primitive societies, he began to see that Skinner's behaviorism was applicable and that it provided a theoretical alternative to Parsonsian-style structural functionalism. This realization led in 1961 to Homans's book *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms*. This work represented the birth of exchange theory as an important perspective in sociology.

Homans's basic view was that the heart of sociology lies in the study of individual behavior and interaction. He was little interested in consciousness or in the various kinds of large-scale structures and institutions that were of concern to most sociologists. His main interest was instead in the reinforcement patterns, the history of rewards and costs, that lead people to do what they do. Basically, Homans argued that people continue to do what they have found to be rewarding in the past. Conversely, they cease doing what has proved to be costly in the past. To understand behavior, we need to understand an individual's history of rewards and costs. Thus, the focus of sociology should be not on consciousness or on social structures and institutions but rather on patterns of reinforcement.

As its name suggests, exchange theory is concerned not only with individual behavior but also with interaction between people involving an exchange of rewards and costs. The premise is that interactions are likely to continue when there is an exchange of rewards. Conversely, interactions that are costly to one or both parties are much less likely to continue.

Another major statement in exchange theory is Peter Blau's *Exchange and Power in Social Life*, published in 1964. Blau basically adopted Homans's perspective, but there was an important difference. Whereas Homans was content to deal mainly with elementary forms of social behavior, Blau wanted to integrate this with exchange at the structural and cultural levels, beginning with exchanges among actors but quickly moving on to the larger structures that emerge out of this exchange. He ended by dealing with exchanges among large-scale structures.

Although he was eclipsed for many years by Homans and Blau, Richard Emerson (1981) has emerged as a central figure in exchange theory (K. Cook and Whitmeyer, 2011). He is noted particularly for his effort to develop a more integrated micro-macro approach to exchange theory. Exchange theory has now developed into a significant strand of sociological theory, and it continues to attract new adherents and to take new directions (K. Cook, O'Brien, and Kollock, 1990; Szmataka and Mazur, 1996).

### **Dramaturgical Analysis: The Work of Erving Goffman**

Erving Goffman (1922–1982) is often thought of as the last major thinker associated with the original Chicago school (Scheff, 2006; G. Smith, 2006; Travers, 1992; Tseelon, 1992); Gary Fine and Philip Manning (2000) have seen him as arguably the most influential twentieth-century American sociologist. Between the 1950s and the 1970s, Goffman published a series of books and essays that gave birth to dramaturgical analysis as a variant of symbolic interactionism. Although Goffman shifted his attention in his later years, he remained best known for his dramaturgical theory (Alieva, 2008; Manning, 2005a, 2005b, 2007).

Goffman's best-known statement of dramaturgical theory, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, was published in 1959. To put it simply, Goffman saw much in common between theatrical performances and the kinds of "acts" we all put on in our day-to-day actions and interactions. Interaction is seen as very fragile, maintained by social performances. Poor performances or disruptions are seen as great threats to social interaction, just as they are to theatrical performances.

Goffman went quite far in his analogy between the stage and social interaction. In all social interaction there is a front region, which is the parallel of the stage front in a theatrical performance. Actors both on the stage and in social life are seen as being interested in appearances, wearing costumes, and using props. Furthermore, in both there is a back region, a place to which the actors can retire to prepare themselves for their performance. Backstage or offstage, in theater terms, the actors can shed their roles and be themselves.

Dramaturgical analysis is clearly consistent with its symbolic-interactionist roots. It has a focus on actors, action, and interaction. Working in the same arena as traditional symbolic interactionism, Goffman found a brilliant metaphor in the theater to shed new light on small-scale social processes (Manning, 1991, 1992).

### **The Development of Sociologies of Everyday Life**

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed a boom (Ritzer, 1975a, 1975b) in several theoretical perspectives that can be lumped together under the heading of sociologies of everyday life (Douglas, 1980; Fontana, 2005; Schutte, 2007; Weigert, 1981).

## Phenomenological Sociology and the Work of Alfred Schutz (1899–1959)

The philosophy of phenomenology (Srubar, 2005), with its focus on consciousness, has a long history, but the effort to develop a sociological variant of phenomenology (Ferguson, 2001) can be traced to the publication of Alfred Schutz's *The Phenomenology of the Social World* in Germany in 1932 (Dreher, 2011; J. Hall, 2007; Prendergast, 2005; Rogers, 2000). Schutz was focally concerned with the way in which people grasp the consciousness of others while they live within their own stream of consciousness. Schutz also used intersubjectivity in a larger sense to mean a concern with the social world, especially the social nature of knowledge.

Much of Schutz's work focuses on an aspect of the social world called the "life-world," or the world of everyday life. This is an intersubjective world in which people both create social reality and are constrained by the preexisting social and cultural structures created by their predecessors. Although much of the life-world is shared, there are also private (biographically articulated) aspects of that world. Within the life-world, Schutz differentiated between intimate face-to-face relationships ("we-relations") and distant and impersonal relationships ("they-relations"). Even though face-to-face relations are of great importance in the life-world, it is far easier for the sociologist to study more impersonal relations scientifically. Although Schutz turned away from consciousness and toward the intersubjective life-world, he did offer insights into consciousness, especially in his thoughts on meaning and people's motives.

Overall, Schutz was concerned with the dialectical relationship between the way people construct social reality and the obdurate social and cultural reality that they inherit from those who preceded them in the social world.

### Ethnomethodology

Although there are important differences between them, ethnomethodology and phenomenology are often seen as closely aligned (Langsdorf, 1995). One of the major reasons for this association is that the creator of this theoretical perspective, Harold Garfinkel, was a student of Alfred Schutz at the New School. Interestingly, Garfinkel previously had studied under Talcott Parsons, and it was the fusion of Parsonian and Schutzian ideas that helped give ethnomethodology its distinctive orientation.

Basically, ethnomethodology is the study of "the body of common-sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations [the methods] by means of which the ordinary members of society make sense of, find their way about in, and act on the circumstances in which they find themselves" (Heritage, 1984:4). Writers in this tradition are heavily tilted in the direction of the study of everyday life (Sharrock, 2001). Whereas phenomenological sociologists tend to focus on what people think, ethnomethodologists are more concerned with what people actually do. Thus, ethnomethodologists devote a lot of attention to the detailed study of conversations. Such mundane concerns stand in stark contrast to the interest of many mainstream sociologists in such abstractions as bureaucracies, capitalism, the division of labor, and the social system. Ethnomethodologists might be interested in the way a sense of these structures is created in everyday life; they are not interested in such structures as phenomena in themselves.

In the last few pages, we have dealt with several micro theories—exchange theory, dramaturgy, phenomenological sociology, and ethnomethodology. Although the last two theories share a sense of a thoughtful and creative actor, such a view is not held by exchange theorists. Nevertheless, all three theories have a primarily micro orientation to actors and their actions and behavior. In the 1970s, such theories grew in strength in sociology and threatened to replace more macro-oriented theories (such as structural functionalism, conflict theory, and neo-Marxian theories) as the dominant theories in sociology (Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Ritzer, 1985).

## Marxian Sociology

In the late 1960s, Marxian theory finally began to make significant inroads into American sociological theory (Cerullo, 1994). An increasing number of sociologists turned to Marx's original work, as well as to that of many Marxists, for insights that would be useful in the development of a Marxian sociology. At first this simply meant that American theorists were finally reading Marx seriously, but later there emerged many significant pieces of Marxian scholarship by American sociologists.

American theorists were particularly attracted to the work of the critical school, especially because of its fusion of Marxian and Weberian theory (Calhoun and Karaganis, 2001). Many of the works have been translated into English, and a number of scholars have written books about the critical school (e.g., Jay, 1973; Kellner, 1993).

Along with an increase in interest came institutional support for such an orientation. Several journals devoted considerable attention to Marxian sociological theory, including *Theory and Society*, *Telos*, *Thesis Eleven*, and *Marxist Studies*. A section on Marxist sociology was created in the American Sociological Association in 1977. Not only did the first generation of critical theorists become well known in America, but second-generation thinkers, especially Jürgen Habermas, and even third-generation theorists such as Axel Honneth, received wide recognition.

Of considerable importance was the development of significant pieces of American sociology done from a Marxian point of view. One very significant strand is a group of sociologists that have done historical sociology from a Marxian perspective (e.g., Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989, 2011b). Another is a group that analyzed the economic realm from a sociological perspective (e.g., Baran and Sweezy, 1966; Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979). Still others have done fairly traditional empirical sociology, but work that is informed by a strong sense of Marxian theory (e.g., Kohn, 1976). Another area is spatial Marxism. A number of important social thinkers (Harvey, 2000; Lefebvre, 1974/1991; Soja, 1989) have examined social geography from a Marxian perspective.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the fall of Marxist regimes around the world, Marxian theory fell on hard times in the 1990s. Despite this, some people remained unreconstructed Marxists; others were forced to develop modified versions of Marxian theory (there is even a journal titled *Rethinking Marxism*). Still others came to the conclusion, perhaps prematurely, that Marxian theory must be abandoned. Representative of the latter position was Ronald Aronson's book *After Marxism* (1995). The very first line of the book tells the story: "Marxism is over, and we are on our own" (1). This from an avowed Marxist! Others recognize the difficulties but seek in various ways to adapt some variety of Marxian theory to contemporary realities (Brugger, 1995; Kellner, 1995).

This said, in recent years, Marxian theory has undergone something of a revival. This is in part a response to the Great Recession of 2008 and the growing economic inequality that has stemmed from the Recession. It has also been spurred on by the worldwide protests over global inequality and government corruption. Often paired with developments in globalization theory (e.g., Hardt and Negri, 2000; Wallerstein, 2011a), this research anticipates that Marx's predicted social revolution is closer than ever before, though it is not guaranteed. In addition, Marxist theory has been updated to include analyses of cutting-edge problems such as the environmental crisis (Foster, 2015; Moore, 2015) and the role that media plays in facilitating capitalist inequality (Fuchs, 2017). Though it is constantly changing to address problems of the present, it is clear that Marxist social theory is not going to disappear anytime soon.

### The Challenge of Feminist Theory

Beginning in the late 1970s, precisely at the moment when Marxian sociology gained significant acceptance from American sociologists, a new theoretical outsider issued a challenge to established sociological theories—and even to Marxian sociology itself. This brand of radical social thought is contemporary feminist theory (Rogers, 2001).

In Western societies, one can trace the record of critical feminist writings back almost 500 years, and there has been an organized political movement by and for women for more than 150 years. In America in 1920, the movement finally won the right for women to vote, fifty-five years after that right had been constitutionally extended to all men. Exhausted and to a degree satiated by victory, the American women's movement over the next thirty years weakened in both size and vigor, only to spring back to life, fully reawakened, in the 1960s. Three factors helped create this new wave of feminist activism: (1) the general climate of critical thinking that characterized the period; (2) the anger of women activists who flocked to the antiwar, civil rights, and student movements only to encounter the sexist attitudes of the liberal and radical men in those movements (Densmore, 1973; Evans, 1980; Morgan, 1970; Shreve, 1989); and (3) women's experience of prejudice and discrimination as they moved in ever-larger numbers into wage work and higher education (Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Garland, 1988). For these reasons, particularly the last one, the women's movement continued into the twenty-first century, even though the activism of many other 1960s movements faded. Moreover, during these years activism by and for women became an international phenomenon, drawing in women from many societies.

Initially, a major feature of this international women's movement was a literature on women that made visible all aspects of women's hitherto unconsidered lives and experiences. This literature, which was popularly referred to as "women's studies," is the work of an international and interdisciplinary community of writers, located both within and outside universities and writing for both the general public and specialized academic audiences. Through the 1990s these theories incorporated an intersectional approach (P. Collins, 1990). Intersectionality theorists argued that oppression and discrimination is not caused by any single social fact but by a set of interacting forces such as gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability.

Most recently, feminist theories have expanded beyond the focus on women to include research on the categories of gender and sexuality more broadly. Much of this scholarship grows out of a perspective called "queer theory." Queer

theory's roots lie in a number of fields, including feminist studies, literary criticism, and, most notably, social constructionism and poststructuralism. It contends that identities, especially gender and sex identities, are not fixed and stable and do not determine who we are. Rather, identities are historically and socially constructed. Queer theory, then, describes the processes by which identities like gay, straight, lesbian, heterosexual, and homosexual are created and "performed" in people's everyday lives. It also shows how ideas about "normal" sex and gender identity often connect to broader social structures like capitalism and patriarchy, and often help to perpetuate inequalities that are a part of those social structures.

## Theories of Race and Colonialism

Another important challenge to modern sociological theory came in the form of theories of race and colonialism. Despite their importance to modern history, until recently, mainstream theorists have not paid race and colonialism much attention. Race is important because, as W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1996) pointed out, it is a central organizational feature of American, and global, society. All modern race theorists agree that race is not a natural, biological category. Instead, it is a social construction that changes over time and place. The concept of race, as we understand it today, did not exist before the colonial encounter (Omi and Winant, 2015). Racial hierarchies, supported by scientific theories such as Social Darwinism, were used to legitimate the racial violence and domination that often accompanied colonization.

One of the most important theorists of race and, more specifically, colonialism was Frantz Fanon (1925–1961). Although he was a psychiatrist and philosopher, his ideas have influenced many social theories of race and colonialism. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1952/2008) introduced the idea that colonial subjects have a "fracture[d]" consciousness (170) and in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961/2004) he developed a Marxian-inspired theory of colonial revolution.

Building on scholars like Fanon, postcolonial theory is a particularly influential perspective in the present moment. Postcolonial theorists argue that even though most of the world was decolonized by the 1960s, the basic power structures of colonialism remain intact. In particular, postcolonial theory emphasizes the role that culture plays in the establishment of colonial and postcolonial power. For example, Edward Said (1935–2003) argued that the scholarly field of Orientalism constructed negative, but widely influential, characterizations of "Oriental" societies (1978/2003). Also, research in the areas of postcolonial feminism and transnational feminism has discussed the ways in which women's lives are impacted by the intersecting forces of race, class, gender, and colonialism. Because it is rooted in literary theory, postcolonial theory has not been widely adopted in sociology. This said, some sociologists have shown how postcolonial ideas can inform contemporary sociological thought in important ways (Go, 2013, 2016; Steinmetz, 2013).

In the United States, there are a number of influential theories of race. Critical race theory originated in the realization that the civil rights movement of the 1960s had lost its momentum, and there was a need not only for a revived social activism but also for new theorizing about race. Critical race theory examines the way in which the legal system reproduces racial inequality. Sociological theorists have also developed more specific theories of race. Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015) introduced a social constructionist theory of racial formation, and Edward Bonilla-Silva (2014) developed a theory of color-blind

racism. Most recently, Emirbayer and Desmond (2015) introduced what they call a systematic theory of race. They argued that even though there is a rich tradition of empirical research on race, sociology has suffered because it has not had an overarching theory of race. Their approach relies upon Bourdieu's concept of the "field" and shows how race and racism is created and reproduced at multiple levels of the social order.

Finally, there is an emerging field of scholarship that attempts to overcome the legacies of racism and colonialism through a rejection, or at least reformulation, of Western knowledge. Here, theory itself is viewed as a kind of knowledge that is grounded in Western ideas that reproduce racial distinctions. To challenge the domination of Western theory, scholars such as Connell (2007) and some working in the field of Native studies (A. Simpson and Smith, 2014; L. Simpson, 2011) have drawn attention to social theories that originate in southern (India, Latin America, Iran) and Indigenous cultures (Aboriginal Australians, Native North Americans). Like the feminist perspective described earlier, and the postmodern perspective described later, these theories challenge conventional ideas about what theory is and how it should be done.

## Structuralism and Poststructuralism

One field of study that we have said little about up to this point is structuralism (Lemert, 1990). We can get a preliminary feeling for structuralism by delineating the basic differences that exist among those who support a structuralist perspective. There are those who focus on what they call the "deep structures of the mind." It is their view that these unconscious structures lead people to think and act as they do. The work of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud might be seen as an example of this orientation. Then there are structuralists who focus on the invisible larger structures of society and see them as determinants of the actions of people as well as of society in general. Marx is sometimes thought of as someone who practiced such a brand of structuralism, with his focus on the unseen economic structure of capitalist society. Still another group sees structures as the models they construct of the social world. Finally, a number of structuralists are concerned with the dialectical relationship between individuals and social structures. They see a link between the structures of the mind and the structures of society. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss is most often associated with this view.

As structuralism grew within sociology, outside sociology a movement was developing beyond the early premises of structuralism: poststructuralism (Lemert, 1990; C. McCormick, 2007). The major representative of poststructuralism is Michel Foucault (Dean, 2001; J. Miller, 1993); another is Giorgio Agamben. In his early work, Foucault focused on structures, but he later moved beyond structures to focus on power and the linkage between knowledge and power. More generally, poststructuralists accept the importance of structure but go beyond it to encompass a wide range of other concerns such as the role that disciplinary knowledge (e.g., psychiatry, criminology, sexology) plays in the construction of modern subjects (i.e., persons).

Poststructuralism is important not only in itself but also because it often is seen as a precursor to postmodern social theory (to be discussed later in this chapter). In fact, it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear line between poststructuralism and postmodern social theory. Thus Foucault, a poststructuralist, is often seen as a postmodernist, while Jean Baudrillard (1972/1981), who usually is labeled a postmodernist, certainly did work that is poststructuralist in character.

## Late Twentieth-Century Integrative Theory

For the most part, the theorists described in previous sections focused on large-scale social forces and structures (structural functionalism, neo-Marxism, post-structuralism), or the small-scale everyday features of social life (dramaturgy, exchange theory, phenomenology, ethnomethodology). In other words, theorists rarely considered both aspects of the social at the same time. Starting roughly in the 1980s, sociologists and social theorists in both Europe and the United States began to develop theories that attempted to bridge this micro-macro or structure-agency gap. The idea was that a complete and comprehensive theory must be able to conceptualize the relationship between small- and large-scale aspects of society at the same time.

### Micro-Macro Integration

George Ritzer (1990) argued that micro-macro linkage emerged as the central problematic in American sociological theory in the 1980s, and it continued to be of focal concern in the 1990s. The contribution of European sociologist Norbert Elias (1939/1994) is an important precursor to contemporary American work on the micro-macro linkage and aids our understanding of the relationship between micro-level manners and the macro-level state (Kilminster and Mennell, 2011; van Krieken, 2001).

There are a number of examples of efforts to link micro and macro levels of analysis and/or theories. Ritzer (1979, 1981) sought to develop a sociological paradigm that integrates micro and macro levels in both their objective and their subjective forms. Thus, there are four major levels of social analysis that must be dealt with in an integrated manner: macro subjectivity, macro objectivity, micro subjectivity, and micro objectivity. Jeffrey Alexander (1982–1983) created a “multidimensional sociology” that deals, at least in part, with a model of levels of analysis that closely resembles Ritzer’s model. James Coleman (1986) concentrated on the micro-to-macro problem, and Allen Liska (1990) extended Coleman’s approach. Coleman (1990) then developed a much more elaborate theory of the micro-macro relationship based on a rational choice approach derived from economics (see the following section on agency-structure integration).

### Agency-Structure Integration

Paralleling the growth in interest in the United States in micro-macro integration was a concern in Europe for agency-structure integration (J. Ryan, 2005a; Sztompka, 1994). Just as Ritzer saw the micro-macro issue as the central problem in American theory, Margaret Archer (1988) saw the agency-structure topic as the basic concern in European social theory. While there are many similarities between the micro-macro and agency-structure literatures (Ritzer and Gindoff, 1992, 1994), there are also substantial differences. For example, although agents are usually micro-level actors, collectivities such as labor unions can also be agents. And although structures are usually macro-level phenomena, we also find structures at the micro level. Thus, we must be careful in equating these two bodies of work and must take much care when trying to interrelate them.

Several major efforts in late twentieth-century European social theory can be included under the heading of agency-structure integration. The first is Anthony Giddens’s (1984; Stones, 2005) structuration theory. Giddens’s approach sees

agency and structure as a “duality.” That is, they cannot be separated from one another: agency is implicated in structure, and structure is involved in agency. Giddens refused to see structure as simply constraining (as, e.g., did Durkheim) and instead sees structure as both constraining and enabling. Margaret Archer (1982) rejected the idea that agency and structure can be viewed as a duality, but instead sees them as a dualism. That is, agency and structure can and should be separated. In distinguishing them, we become better able to analyze their relationship to one another. Archer (1988) is also notable for having extended the agency-structure literature to a concern for the relationship between culture and agency and for developing a more general agency-structure theory (Archer, 1995).

Whereas both Giddens and Archer are British, another major contemporary figure involved in the agency-structure literature is Pierre Bourdieu from France (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Swartz, 1997). In Bourdieu’s work, the agency-structure issue translates into a concern for the relationship between habitus and field (A. F. Eisenberg, 2007). *Habitus* is an internalized mental, or cognitive, structure through which people deal with the social world. The habitus both produces, and is produced by, the society. The *field* is a network of relations among objective positions. The structure of the field serves to constrain agents, whether they are individuals or collectivities. Overall, Bourdieu is concerned with the relationship between habitus and field. The field conditions the habitus, and the habitus constitutes the field. Thus, there is a dialectical relationship between habitus and field.

The final major theorist of the agency-structure linkage is the German social thinker Jürgen Habermas. We have already mentioned Habermas as a significant contemporary contributor to critical theory. Habermas (1987b) has also dealt with the agency-structure issue under the heading of “the colonization of the life-world.” The life-world is a micro world where people interact and communicate. The system has its roots in the life-world, but it ultimately comes to develop its own structural characteristics. As these structures grow in independence and power, they come to exert more and more control over the life-world. In the modern world, the system has come to “colonize” the life-world—that is, to exert control over it.

## Theoretical Syntheses

The movements toward micro-macro integration and agency-structure integration began in the 1980s, and both continued to be strong in the 1990s. They set the stage for the broader movement toward theoretical syntheses, which began in the early 1990s. Reba Lewis (1991) has suggested that sociology’s problem (assuming it has a problem) may be the result of excessive fragmentation and that the movement toward greater integration may enhance the status of the discipline. What is involved here is a wide-ranging effort to synthesize two or more different theories (e.g., structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism). Such efforts have occurred throughout the history of sociological theory (Holmwood and Stewart, 1994). However, there are two distinctive aspects of the recent synthetic work in sociological theory. First, it is very widespread and not restricted to isolated attempts at synthesis. Second, the goal is generally a relatively narrow synthesis of theoretical ideas, not the development of a grand synthetic theory that encompasses all of sociological theory. These synthetic works are occurring within and among many of the theories discussed in this chapter.

Then there are efforts to bring perspectives from outside sociology into sociological theory. For example, under the title “social and political thought” there

are numerous research programs that attempt to draw together political and social theory. Indeed, one of the founding principles of the aforementioned, newly established *European Journal of Social Theory* is “to overcome the divide between social and political theory with respect to the reinterpretation of the classics and the demands of the present situation” (Delanty, 1998:1; see also B. Turner, 2009). The implication is that adequate analysis of the contemporary world situation requires interdisciplinary perspectives. Major contemporary social theory journals such as *Theory, Culture & Society*, as well as *Body & Society* also embrace interdisciplinary perspectives. There also have been works oriented to bringing biological ideas into sociology in an effort to create sociobiology (Crippen, 1994; Maryanski and Turner, 1992) and, more recently, affect theory (Clough, 2008; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002). Rational choice theory is based in economics, but it has made inroads into a number of fields, including sociology (Coleman, 1990; Heckathorn, 2005). Systems theory has its roots in the hard sciences, but in the late twentieth century Niklas Luhmann (1984/1995) made a powerful effort to develop a systems theory that could be applied to the social world.

## Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity

Toward the end of the twentieth century, social theorists<sup>7</sup> were increasingly interested in the question of whether society (as well as theories about it) has undergone a dramatic transformation. On one side is a group of theorists (e.g., Jürgen Habermas, Zygmunt Bauman, and Anthony Giddens) who believe that we continue to live in a society that still can best be described as modern and about which we can theorize in much the same way that social thinkers have long contemplated society. On the other side is a group of thinkers (e.g., Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson) who contend that society has changed so dramatically that we now live in a qualitatively different, postmodern society. Furthermore, they argue that this new society needs to be thought about in new and different ways. The heated debate between modernists and postmodernists led to numerous theoretical developments that continue to influence the field.

### The Defenders of Modernity

All the great classical sociological theorists (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Du Bois, Simmel, and Gilman) were concerned, in one way or another, with the modern world and its advantages and disadvantages (Sica, 2005). Of course, the world has changed dramatically since the early twentieth century. Although contemporary theorists recognize these dramatic changes, there are some who believe that there is more continuity than discontinuity between the world today and the world that existed around the last *fin de siècle*.

Stjepan Meštrović (1988:2) has labeled Anthony Giddens “the high priest of modernity.” Giddens (1990, 1991, 1992) uses terms such as “radical,” “high,” or “late” modernity to describe society today and to indicate that although it is not the same society as the one described by the classical theorists, it is continuous with that society. Giddens sees modernity today as a “juggernaut,” that is, at

<sup>7</sup>The term *social theorist* rather than *sociological theorist* is used here to reflect the fact that many contributors to the recent literature are not sociologists, although they are theorizing about the social world.

least to some degree, out of control. Ulrich Beck (1992, 2005b; Ekberg, 2007; Jensen and Blok, 2008; Then, 2007) contends that whereas the classical stage of modernity was associated with industrial society, the emerging new modernity is best described as a “risk society.” Whereas the central dilemma in classical modernity was wealth and how it ought to be distributed, the central problem in new modernity is the prevention, minimization, and channeling of risk (from, e.g., a nuclear accident). Jürgen Habermas (1984, 1987a) sees modernity as an “unfinished project.” That is, the central issue in the modern world continues, as it was in Weber’s day, to be rationality. The utopian goal is still the maximization of the rationality of both the “system” and the “life-world.” Charles Taylor (1989, 2004, 2007) argues that contemporary selves and societies emerge out of cultural frameworks and moral ideals developed across the modern era. Ritzer (2015) sees rationality as the key process in the world today. However, he picks up on Weber’s focus on the problem of the increase in formal rationality and the danger of an “iron cage” of rationality. Weber focused on the bureaucracy. Today Ritzer sees the paradigm of this process as the fast-food restaurant, and describes the increase in formal rationality as “the McDonaldization of society.” Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2011; Bauman and Lyon, 2012), has produced a series of basically modern analyses of what he calls the “liquid” world.

### The Proponents of Postmodernity

Even though few would now call themselves postmodernists, at the end of the twentieth century, postmodernism was hot (Crook, 2001; Kellner, 1989; Ritzer, 1997; Ritzer and Goodman, 2001) and consequently has had a major impact on social theory. We need to differentiate, at least initially, between postmodernity and postmodern social theory (Best and Kellner, 1991). Postmodernity is a historical epoch that is supposed to have succeeded the modern era, or modernity. Postmodern social theory is a way of thinking about postmodernity; the world is so different that it requires entirely new ways of thinking. Postmodernists would tend to reject the theoretical perspectives outlined in the previous section, as well as the ways in which the thinkers involved created their theories.

There are probably as many portrayals of postmodernity as there are postmodern social theorists. To simplify things, we summarize some of the key elements of a depiction offered by one of the most prominent postmodernists, Fredric Jameson (1984, 1991). First, postmodernity is a depthless, superficial world; it is a world of simulation (e.g., a jungle cruise at Disneyland rather than the real thing). Second, it is a world that is lacking in affect and emotion. Third, there is a loss of a sense of one’s place in history; it is hard to distinguish past, present, and future. Fourth, instead of the explosive, expanding, productive technologies of modernity (e.g., automobile assembly lines), postmodern society is dominated by implosive, flattening, reproductive technologies (e.g., television). In these and other ways, postmodern society is very different from modern society.

Such a different world requires a different way of thinking. Pauline Rosenau (1992; see also Ritzer, 1997) defined the postmodern mode of thought in terms of the things that it opposes, largely characteristics of the modern way of thinking. First, postmodernists reject the kind of grand narratives that characterize much of classical sociological theory. Instead, postmodernists prefer more limited explanations, or even no explanations at all. Second, there is a rejection of the tendency to put boundaries between disciplines—to engage in something

called “sociological (or social) theory” that is distinct from, say, philosophical thinking or even novelistic storytelling. Third, postmodernists are often more interested in shocking or startling the reader than they are in engaging in careful, reasoned academic discourse. Finally, instead of looking for the core of society (say, rationality or capitalistic exploitation), postmodernists are more inclined to focus on more peripheral aspects of society.

Although postmodern theory has reached its peak and now is in decline, it continues to exert a powerful impact on theory. On the one hand, new contributions to the theory continue to appear (e.g., Powell and Owen, 2007). On the other hand, it is very difficult to theorize these days without taking into account postmodern theory, especially its critiques of modern theorizing and its analyses of the contemporary world.

## Social Theory in the Twenty-First Century

The debates surrounding theoretical integration and then modernism and postmodernism, although still relevant, have for the most part faded without clear resolution. This has left social theory, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, struggling for renewed identity (B. Turner, 2009). The major theoretical perspectives outlined in this review and detailed throughout this book will remain relevant and continue to grow. Theory will always ground itself in relationship to its history and the debates that history has entailed. This said, it is worth considering where theory is now and where it might be going. To this end, in this section we describe a number of thematic areas that are particularly relevant to social theory at the beginning of the twenty-first century: consumption and prosumption, globalization, and science and technology. Each of these areas has given rise to a variety of theoretical perspectives that are pushing social theory in new directions.

### Theories of Consumption

Coming of age during the Industrial Revolution and animated by its problems and prospects, sociological theory has long had a “productivist bias.” That is, theories have tended to focus on industry, industrial organizations, work, and workers. This bias is most obvious in Marxian and neo-Marxian theory, but it is found in many other theories, such as Durkheim’s thinking on the division of labor, Weber’s work on the rise of capitalism in the West and the failure to develop it in other parts of the world, Simmel’s analysis of the tragedy of culture produced by the proliferation of human products, the interest of the Chicago school in work, and the concern in conflict theory with relations between employers and employees, leaders and followers, and so on. Much less attention has been devoted to consumption and the consumer. There are exceptions, such as Thorstein Veblen’s (1899/1994) famous work on “conspicuous consumption” and Simmel’s thinking on money (1907/1978) and fashion (1904/1971), but for the most part, social theorists have had far less to say about consumption than about production.

Postmodern social theory has tended to define postmodern society as a consumer society, with the result that consumption plays a central role in that theory (Venkatesh, 2007). Most notable is Jean Baudrillard’s (1970/1998) *The Consumer Society*. Lipovetsky’s (1987/1994) post-postmodern work on fashion is reflective of the growing interest in and out of postmodern social theory in consumption. Because consumption is likely to continue to grow in importance,

especially in the West, and production is likely to decline, it is safe to assume that we will see a dramatic increase in theoretical (and empirical) work on consumption (Ritzer, Goodman, and Wiedenhof, 2001; for an overview of extant theories of consumption, see Slater, 1997, 2005). To take one example, we are witnessing something of an outpouring of theoretically based work on the settings in which we consume, such as *Consuming Places* (Urry, 1995), *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Continuity and Change in the Cathedrals of Consumption* (Ritzer, 2010), and *Shelf Life: Supermarkets and the Changing Cultures of Consumption* (Humphery, 1998). We are likely to see much more work on such settings, as well as on consumers, consumer goods, and the process of consumption. A very new direction in this domain is work on *prosumers*, those who simultaneously produce and consume, especially on the Internet and Web 2.0 (e.g., blogs, Facebook) (Ritzer, 2009; Ritzer, Dean, and Jurgenson, 2012).

## Theories of Globalization

Although there have been other important developments in theory in the early twenty-first century, it seems clear that *the* most important developments are in theories of globalization (Robinson, 2007). Theorizing globalization is nothing new. In fact, it could be argued that although classical theorists such as Marx and Weber lacked the term, they devoted much attention to theorizing globalization. Similarly, many theories (e.g., modernization, dependency, and world-system theory) and theorists (e.g., Alex Inkeles, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein) were theorizing about globalization in different terms and under other theoretical rubrics. Precursors to theorizing about globalization go back to the 1980s (and even before; see Moore, 1966; Nettl and Robertson, 1968) and began to gain momentum in the 1990s (Albrow, 1996; Albrow and King, 1990; Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998; García Canclini, 1995; Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez, 1997; Robertson, 1992). Such theorizing has really taken off in the twenty-first century (Beck, 2000, 2005a; Giddens, 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Ritzer, 2004, 2007, 2009; J. Rosenau, 2003). Theories of globalization can be categorized under three main headings—economic, political, and cultural theories. Economic theories, undoubtedly the best known, can be broadly divided into two categories: theories that celebrate the neoliberal global economic market (e.g., T. Friedman, 2000, 2005; see Antonio, 2007, for a critique of Friedman’s celebration of the neoliberal market) and theories, often from a Marxian perspective (Collier, 2011; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Robinson, 2004; Sklair, 1991), that are critical of it.

In political theory, one position is represented by the liberal approach (derived from the classical work of John Locke, Adam Smith, and others) (MacPherson, 1962), especially in the form of neoliberal thinking (J. Campbell and Pederson, 2001) (often called the “Washington consensus” [Williamson, 1990, 1997]), which favors political systems that support and defend the free market. On the other side are thinkers more on the left (e.g., Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Harvey, 2005) who are critical of this view.

A central issue in political theory is the continued viability of the nation-state. On one side are those who see the nation-state as dead or dying in an era of globalization, or at least changing dramatically (Cerny, 2010). On the other side of this issue are defenders of the continued importance of the nation-state. At least one of them (J. Rosenberg, 2005) has gone so far as to argue that globalization theory has already come and gone as a result of the continued existence, even reassertion, of the nation-state (e.g., American President Donald Trump’s “America first” policies and Brexit).

Although economic and political issues are of great importance, it is cultural issues and cultural theories that have attracted the most attention in sociology. We can divide cultural theories into three broad approaches (Pieterse, 2004). The first is cultural differentialism, in which the argument is made that among cultures there are deep and largely impervious differences that are unaffected or are affected only superficially by globalization (Huntington, 1996). Second, the proponents of cultural convergence argue that although important differences remain among cultures, there is also convergence, increasing homogeneity, across cultures (Boli and Lechner, 2005; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer et al., 1997; Ritzer, 2004, 2007, 2015). Third, there is cultural hybridization, in which it is contended that the global and the local interpenetrate to create unique indigenous realities that can be seen as “glocalization” (Robertson, 1992, 2001), “hybridization” (García Canclini, 1995), and “creolization” (Hannerz, 1987). Much of the sociological thinking on globalization has been concerned with the issue, implied earlier, of the degree to which globalization is leading to homogenization or to heterogenization.

It seems clear that the various theories of globalization, as well as later variants of it that will come to the fore in the coming years, will continue to dominate new developments in sociological theory. However, other developments are worth watching.

### Theories of Science, Technology, and Society

Another area of recent theoretical growth is captured under the term *science and technology studies* (also referred to as science, technology, and society studies and science studies; see Hess, 1997, for discussion of these differences). Some theorists in this field prefer to use the term *technoscience* to indicate the fusion of scientific knowledge with practical interventions into everyday life (Erikson and Webster, 2011).

This field studies how science and technology impacts social, cultural, and personal life. The field is quite diverse, often leading to very different ideas about how science and society are interrelated. For example, early theorists of science and society (such as Robert Merton) treated science as just one more social institution. Contemporary theorists tend to see science and society as more deeply intertwined and many have adopted a social constructionist perspective (see Erikson and Webster, 2011), meaning that science does not neutrally describe reality but actually structures social life. Donna Haraway (1991; Wirth-Cauchon, 2011) has argued that we now live in a technoscientific society that has turned people into cyborgs. The interest here is in the constitutive relationship, both positive and negative, between humans and technology and, more recently, humans and animals (see Haraway, 2007). Many contemporary theories of science also focus on the interrelationship among capitalism, politics, and technoscience. This has led to the widespread use (see Collier, 2011) of terms like Michel Foucault's *biopolitics* (the manipulation and control of populations through biological knowledge) and *biocapital* (the economic value produced through technoscientific research).

In terms of contributions to social theory more generally, actor-network theory is likely the most important perspective in science and technology studies. On one hand, it is part of the broad and increasing interest in networks of various kinds (e.g., Castells, 1996; Mizuchi, 2005). On the other hand, it introduces the novel idea that modern societies are not exclusively (and never have been!) made up of human beings. Rather, actor-network theorists

argue that the world is made up of various actants—human and nonhuman agents that each have unique properties and capacities (e.g., bacteria, animals, computers, cell phones). Societies are created when these various actants are “assembled” into short or long-lasting combinations. For example, the social life of a scientific laboratory depends on assembling into a coherent whole human actors (scientists), scientific instruments, and natural actants (like a virus). This allows something called “scientific knowledge” to be produced. This emphasis on the variety of agents (especially techno-agents) involved in social life is in line with increasing scholarly interest in the posthuman (Franklin, 2007) and the postsocial (Knorr-Cetina, 2001, 2005, 2007; Mayall, 2007). We are increasingly involved in networks that encompass both human and nonhuman components, and in their relationships with the latter, humans are clearly in a posthuman and postsocial world.

The study of science and technology has also led theorists to a more interdisciplinary engagement with the findings of the natural sciences. Historically, the most important of these perspectives is sociobiology, which draws on evolutionary theory to make claims about the biological basis of human behavior (F. Nielsen, 1994). Systems theorists such as Niklas Luhmann (1982, 1997/2012) and Kenneth Bailey (1994) draw on research in cybernetics, biological science, and cognitive psychology, among others. Most recently, theorists in the area of affect theory combine research in the life sciences with postmodern and post-structuralist ideas (Clough, 2008; Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002). This emerging theoretical perspective takes a critical view of mainstream science but nevertheless respects nature or matter as a force in itself, independent of culture and society. The problem for affect theory is to understand how biology and society mutually influence each other.

We are now at the close of the chapter reviewing developments in contemporary theory, but we certainly have not reached the end of theory development. One thing seems sure—the landscape of social theory is likely to be dotted with more theories, none of them likely to gain hegemony in the field. Postmodernists have criticized the idea of “totalizations,” or overarching theoretical frameworks. It seems unlikely that social theory will come to be dominated by a single totalization. Rather, we are likely to see a field with a proliferating number of perspectives that have some supporters and that help us understand part of the social world. Sociological theory will not be a simple world to understand and to use, but it will be an exciting world that offers a plethora of old and new ideas.

## Summary

This chapter picks up where Chapter 1 left off and deals with the history of sociological theory since the beginning of the twentieth century. We begin with the early history of American sociological theory, which was characterized by its liberalism, by its interest in Social Darwinism, and consequently

by the influence of Herbert Spencer. In this context, the work of the two early sociological theorists, Sumner and Ward, is discussed. However, they did not leave a lasting imprint on American sociological theory. In contrast, the Chicago school, as embodied in the work of people such as Small, Park, Thomas, Cooley,

and especially Mead, did leave a strong mark on sociological theory, especially on symbolic interactionism. At the same time, early women sociologists, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, theorized the relationship between gender and social inequality. In Atlanta, African American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois founded a school grounded in his unique approach to sociology. The Du Bois-Atlanta school pioneered the use of multiple research methods. Its focal interest in race remains relevant to this day.

While the Chicago school was still predominant, a different form of sociological theory began to develop at Harvard. Pitirim Sorokin played a key role in the founding of sociology at Harvard, but it was Talcott Parsons who was to lead Harvard to a position of preeminence in American theory, replacing Chicago's symbolic interactionism. Parsons was important not only for legitimizing "grand theory" in the United States and for introducing European theorists to an American audience but also for his role in the development of action theory and, more important, structural functionalism. In the 1940s and 1950s, structural functionalism was furthered by the disintegration of the Chicago school that began in the 1930s and was largely complete by the 1950s.

The major development in Marxian theory in the early years of the twentieth century was the creation of the Frankfurt, or critical, school. This Hegelianized form of Marxism also showed the influence of sociologists like Weber and of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. Marxism did not gain a widespread following among sociologists in the early part of the century.

Structural functionalism's dominance within American theory in midcentury was rather short lived. Although traceable to a much earlier date, phenomenological sociology, especially the work of Alfred Schutz, began to attract significant attention in the 1960s. Marxian theory was still largely excluded from American theory, but Wright Mills kept a radical tradition

alive in America in the 1940s and 1950s. Mills also was one of the leaders of the attacks on structural functionalism, attacks that mounted in intensity in the 1950s and 1960s. In light of some of these attacks, a conflict-theory alternative to structural functionalism emerged in that period. Although influenced by Marxian theory, conflict theory suffered from an inadequate integration of Marxism. Still another alternative born in the 1950s was exchange theory, which continues to attract a small but steady number of followers. Although symbolic interactionism lost some of its steam, the work of Erving Goffman on dramaturgical analysis in this period gained a following.

Important developments took place in other sociologies of everyday life (symbolic interactionism can be included under this heading) in the 1960s and 1970s, including some increase in interest in phenomenological sociology and, more important, an outburst of work in ethnomethodology. During this period Marxian theories of various types came into their own in sociology, although those theories were seriously compromised by the fall of the Soviet Union and other communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This period also saw the development of feminist theories and the emergence of theories of race and colonialism. Also of note during this period was the growing importance of structuralism and then post-structuralism, especially in the work of Michel Foucault.

In addition to those just mentioned, three other notable developments occurred in the 1980s and continued into the 1990s. First was the rise in interest in the United States in the micro-macro link. Second was the parallel increase in attention in Europe to the relationship between agency and structure. Third was the growth, especially in the 1990s, of a wide range of synthetic efforts. Finally, there was considerable interest in a series of theories of modernity and postmodernity in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of several thematic areas that have occupied social theorists in the twenty-first century. We can expect increasing interest in consumption and prosumption and in theorizing about it. This relates to postmodern theory (consumer society is closely associated with postmodern society), reflects changes in society from an emphasis on production to consumption, as well as a reaction

against the productivist bias that has dominated sociological theory since its inception. Theories of globalization have also played a prominent role in this most recent phase of sociological theory development. Contemporary theory is also concerned with the role that science and technology, or technoscience, play in the constitution of society. Major theories in this area are actor-network theory and affect theory.

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