

# CHAPTER 1

## Theory

### Introduction: Sociological Theory and Religion

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As a scientific discipline, sociology offers certain types of insight, and excludes others. One of the most common errors regarding science in general, both in the natural and the social sciences, is to align scientific theory with political orientations. This conflates two different things. Science attempts to understand the world, and while this always involves a bias of perspective, it is not the same as a political orientation that seeks to control social institutions and exert decision-making power. Although science can provide insight upon which political platforms may be based, science as a means of generating knowledge and insight, whether natural or social science, is not a political platform. It is an analytical system, not a system of management and political control. In our effort to understand religion, sociology studies religion critically, but at the same time cannot draw conclusions about the merit of particular religious belief or practice. As with any science, critical analysis, using logic and evidence, constitutes the basis of knowledge, not the political agenda that scientific knowledge may inform. In this sense, so-called conservative theories such as functionalism and rational choice are no less critical of conventional notions than leftist or so-called radical theories, such as Marxism or feminism.

Sociology as we know it today began as an attempt to apply scientific principles of logic and evidence to modern society. In particular, scholars sought to understand modern society in order to understand and hopefully alleviate its social problems. For sociologists, modern society begins with the rise of the industrial era, in the early 1800s. However, historians would point out that the basic elements of modernism emerged during the Renaissance, which we can date from the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Many scholars, artists, statesmen, and religious leaders—in

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essence, most of the intelligentsia and creative classes of the Byzantine civilization—fled to the West, mostly to Italy after 1453, and contributed their talents and energy to the Italian city-states, which rose as the founders of the Renaissance. From 1453 to the beginning of the Enlightenment around 1700, all the decisive elements of modernism emerged. Most importantly, science and math developed sufficiently to allow for rationalization—which means to make something systematic and predictable. This would eventually affect all spheres of life, including religion.

Thus, sociology has long held a Western focus, given its origins as a science devoted to understanding modernity as it arose first in the West. This differs from a Western bias, a prejudiced and ethnocentric notion that the West serves as the standard for all things, that the West is the best and everything else fails by comparison. The study of Western modernism defined much of sociology, its approach and concepts, and developed most extensively in Germany, France, and the United States. Still today, the vast majority of sociological research and theory comes from these three countries. However, nothing prevents sociology from expanding and adjusting concepts so they apply meaningfully to non-Western religion. The goal is to understand, not to judge, the essential quality of one religion over and against another.

Still, sociology does not just study social phenomena; it also organizes such phenomena conceptually and actively draws conclusions. These conclusions create an order to our understanding of reality, and in this way, sociology is not a neutral observer. We seek to create order using scientific research methods and conceptualization. We apply theoretical frameworks in order to interpret data.

However, we do not seek to make normative, that is, to make value judgments about, what is right or wrong, what is on the right path spiritually, or what is misguided. Nevertheless, a sociologist does argue about right and wrong in terms of logic, evidence, and analysis. As a science, sociology cannot discuss what is true or not true about the nature of God or what sorts of thoughts and behavior God may or may not approve of, but we can discuss and prove or disprove what any given religion or understanding of God represents in a social context. That is, given the time and place in which we observe particular practices or beliefs, we can discern what they reveal about the people and the society that uphold them. Sociological validity stands on observable evidence and the logic of theory.

This chapter examines sociological theory relevant to the study of religion. Later chapters will occasionally expand on theory, but focus more on empirical observations about religion.

### Death and the Meaning of Life

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In order to understand religion today, one must also understand its counterpart—spirituality. While religious practitioners often view themselves as spiritual, it makes good sociological sense to distinguish between these concepts. Indeed, empirical research confirms that religion and spirituality are in actual practice two different things (see Table 1.1). Dictionaries are often not very useful in scientific endeavors, because they typically convey conventional, pedestrian usage, not scientific conceptualization. In sociology, religion is not simply a definition, but an analytical concept.

What is religion? In a recent book, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005) define religion as a more or less fixed institution that exists independently from the people who attend its services, volunteer for its projects, and serve in its administrative offices. As an institution, a religion teaches particular beliefs and practices, and expects new and continuing members to conform to its institutional requirements. Religion premises a common good and higher authority, both of which supersede the individual (p. 14). Furthermore, religions consist of congregations—groups of believers who assemble consistently to celebrate their faith and perform necessary rituals. Sometimes a central authority or organizational bureaucracy unites the various congregations, but just as often does not. Some religions are significantly centralized, such as Catholicism in Rome (Vatican City) or Southern Baptism (the Southern Baptist Convention). Others, such as Islam and Hinduism, have no formal centralized authority or organizational bureaucracy. Nevertheless, all of these religions and others evidence common-good ethics (at least for their own members) and devotion to a higher entity that possesses transcendent power, wisdom, love, and other attributes otherwise beyond human capacity.

A related and often confusing concept is spirituality. This concept refers to a much broader sense of connection between the individual and the surrounding world. It exists as a feeling, rather than as an observable pattern of behavior or set of beliefs. Decisively, spirituality emphasizes individual and subjective feeling and experience rather than devotion to external, collective, and superior beliefs, rites, and deities. Heelas and Woodhead (2005) identify this as a holistic approach that privileges personal and subjective emotions and experiences as more valid than formally established creeds or churches. In holistic spirituality, the individual is free to construct personal beliefs, and choose freely from any source material to invent a personal blend to suit individual needs and tastes. Moreover, spirituality of this sort and religion often compete against each other, and empirical research shows that “the congregational domain and holistic milieu constitute two largely separate and distinct worlds (Heelas and Woodhead 2005:32). This conflict occurs because religion consists of institutional structures that maintain consistency across generations. We could say that religions serve communities. In contrast, spirituality consists of individuals who, even when they join together in groups, retain a highly personalized set of beliefs and practices. We could say that spirituality serves individuals.

Does this mean that religious congregations neutralize individuality? In some ways, yes, particularly regarding the essential beliefs and practices of the religion. For example, it is difficult to be Catholic if one does not recognize the authority of the Pope in religious matters, or if one does not accept the Nicene Creed as valid. In other ways, however, religious congregants are free to maintain their individuality. For example, Catholics are free to dress as they want, hold divergent political views, and disagree about interpretations of the Bible. In Wahhabism, a strict version of Islam enforced by the government (an institution) in Saudi Arabia, religious beliefs dictate manner of dress, especially for women, who are forbidden to appear in public with their head uncovered. In any case, it is the institutional structure and collectively oriented beliefs that define religion, not the strictness or comprehensiveness of belief. Some religions govern most of life, others only certain aspects of life.

Similarly, the individualistic nature of spirituality usually includes some commonalities. For example, most spiritual systems, such as New Age, Theosophy, and

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**Table 1.1** Religion and Spirituality

<i>Religion</i>	<i>Spirituality</i>
<b>Common-Good Ethics</b> —The needs of the community override the needs of the few, or the one	<b>Individual Ethics</b> —Beliefs and values serve the personal needs of the individual
<b>Common-Good Morality</b> —The institution decides right and wrong	<b>Individual Morality</b> —The individual decides right and wrong
<b>Institutional Autonomy</b> —Religion exists trans-generationally and independently of personal control	<b>Personal Autonomy</b> —Spirituality exists within and for each individual
<b>Institutional Hegemony</b> —Exists externally to and coercive of the individual; responds to historical change, not personal decisions	<b>Personal Hegemony</b> —Personal freedom of choice; responds to personal feeling and choices

Swedenborgianism, share beliefs of balance, that harmony arises from the proper balance of energy (Ellwood 1995; E. Taylor 1995). Individual innovation often draws from widely diverse sources, and people share ideas quite extensively. Just as religious congregants retain many personal characteristics, so spiritualists share certain ideas despite their personalized beliefs.

While both religion and spirituality have degrees of individuality and degrees of collectivity, religion is premised overall on collective continuance, whereas spirituality is premised on individual autonomy. In religion, the community is the measure of all things; in spirituality, the individual is the measure of all things. A religion requires collective commitment but may allow individuality. In spirituality, an individual may choose collective commitment or not. This book will use the term *religion* broadly and often encompass what technically should be called spirituality, unless otherwise noted. As with the issue of faith, much of the sociology of religion applies equally to spirituality.

Overall, both religion and spirituality share something in common—a leap of faith. In other words, both depend, at an essential level, on faith—that which *cannot be proven or disproven* but is accepted as true. The emphasis here is that faith *cannot* be proven, which differs from something that *is not yet* proven, but could possibly be proven through empirical means. To make this distinction, Max Weber often quoted Tertullian (Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, 155–230 CE), who in defense of early Christianity said, “Credo non quod, sed quia absurdum” or in translation, “I believe nothing except that which is absurd.” At some point, all religions define themselves through articles of faith, not proof. Although religion need not necessarily be in conflict with other ways of knowing, such as science, religion goes beyond the observable world to which science is limited. From Tertullian to Weber to present-day theorists and many in between, faith often contrasts with logic and reason, and thus in comparison appears “absurd” if a person privileges logic over faith. At the same time, some faith-based explanations appear absurd if applied to issues of observation and logic.

In the long-standing faith versus reason dichotomy, no resolution is possible, nor even any discourse as each side premises its knowledge on entirely different and

contrary grounds. However, as Stephen Jay Gould (2002) (a biologist by training) argued throughout his career, each form of knowledge speaks to a different sphere of knowledge; faith and reason are both accurate because they address essentially different aspects of existence. While this view definitely makes progress, this textbook, as argued in the introduction, proceeds with the assumption that we have not yet learned either to decisively separate or combine faith and reason. While I agree that Gould's position works effectively most of the time, students should consider the full range of human knowledge and use it to develop their own insight. The way in which pieces fit together may yet require a wholly new approach.

For now, let us remain in established theory.

## The Place of Religion in Society

The words at the end of this sentence, among the most famous in all of the English language, describe the existential conundrum of humanity—"to be or not to be. . ." To live or not to live, and if to live, how and why? For what purpose? And what of death, that "undiscover'd country from whose bourn no traveler returns"? We thus face an existential crisis that, as Hamlet realizes, has no automatic answer, no decisively true and certain solution. We have instead only feelings and intellect that, with effort, may produce a sense of conviction (a sense of faith) that we have discovered the meaning of life, and how to live it correctly. Throughout human history, religion has spoken to such existential uncertainties, and to the extent we hear its words and enact its rituals, religion successfully instills meaning where otherwise we would face only an infinite void of despair.

### To be, or not to be: that is the question . . .

To die: to sleep; No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
 The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
 That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation  
 Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;  
 To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;  
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come  
 When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
 Must give us pause: there's the respect  
 That makes calamity of so long life. . . .

But that the dread of something after death,  
 The undiscover'd country from whose bourn  
 No traveler returns, puzzles the will  
 And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
 Than fly to others that we know not of.

—William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

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We can embrace Shakespeare, and many others, who express the essence of human existence with great eloquence and passion. However, such is not our purpose as sociologists. There are other ways to understand the human condition, and through science, we may understand in ways that differ from the poet's moving passages, but perhaps, by the end of this book, prove no less powerful.

In his now classic *The Sacred Canopy* ([1967] 1990), the sociologist Peter Berger identifies the vital existential questions—questions that define the meaning of life—that underlie all of human existence. Berger poses four great questions:

#### Peter Berger's Four Existential Imperatives

Who am I?

Why am I here?

How should I live?

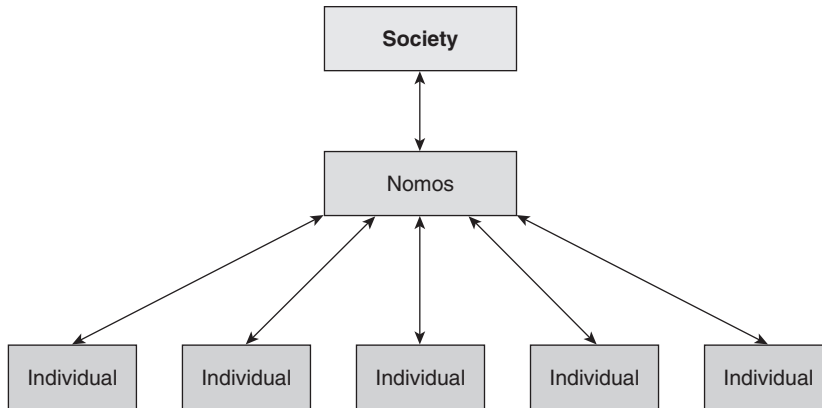
What happens when I die?

For Berger, these questions define the uncertainty of human existence, and religion serves to answer these questions at some collective level. To be effective, they must be shared answers acknowledged among a population of people yet which each individual accepts willingly; they cannot be forced onto people. Furthermore, the revealed religions face an additional pressing issue—the problem of *theodicy*. The revealed religions are those that hold that God has a revealed purpose for all people, and that we are moving inexorably toward some final moment, whether Armageddon—the final battle between good and evil—or salvation, or possibly both. Theodicy is the issue that arises thus: If God is good and cares about us, why does evil exist? Furthermore, if God is omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful), then again, why does evil exist? In the earlier mystery religions, theodicy was not an issue, because God (or the gods) offered no particular plan, and no particular end point to history. The mysteries were revealed only to a select few, usually only after grueling initiation rituals or by the merit of one's birth.

Finally, Berger concludes that in responding to the four great existential questions, and to the issue of theodicy, religion provides a *nomos*, a coherent system of meaning that connects the individual to society and to a sense of purpose above and beyond the empirical and temporal realm (see Figure 1.1). Meaning must be universal and eternal, but also relevant to real moments in life, especially the existential moments of birth, life, and death.

Thus, religion is a set of beliefs that connect the individual to a community, and in turn to a sense of being or purpose that transcends the individual and the mundane. In this way, people reassure themselves, through collective belief, that life is more than a series of events that ends in death, but part of something eternal, something important, something that assures the individual a place in this world, and in some larger scheme of being.

Religion is thus crucial for the long-term survival of any community, because it not only justifies the particular values and lifestyle of a community, but



**Figure 1.1** Role of the Nomos

reinforces purpose and meaning, and thus connects the present with the past and future. Religious beliefs are thus the collective totality of social beliefs, which, precisely because they are collective and derived from social, not individual existence, appear to the individual as eternal and transcendent truths, as something outside of and beyond the individual, and which must empower the individual as an active member of the very same community. Thus humans create a feeling of the supernatural, of spiritual connections beyond what can be directly observed.

Berger identifies the central aspect of spirituality, deistic or not, as its ability to construct and maintain a nomos—a belief system that explains the meaning of life. This nomos arises specifically from actual social relations as well as visions of society as it ought to be. Without a nomos, a society falls into alienation and *anomie* (a sense of being without values that meaningfully explain life and therefore place meaningful moral regulation on conduct), which produces diverse and extensive social problems. For example, Native Americans continued to live after Europeans destroyed their civilizations, but they lived as strangers in a homeland that was now a strange land, stripped of political power as well as cultural and personal identity.

Yet a firmly accepted nomos builds societies and can hold a social group together despite intolerance and persecution. Numerous historical examples exist: Christians under ancient Rome; the Jews in the diaspora after 70 CE until the 20th century; African Americans during the civil rights struggle, the same aforementioned Native Americans who rediscovered their cultural heritage—all of which united with a specifically religious nomos.

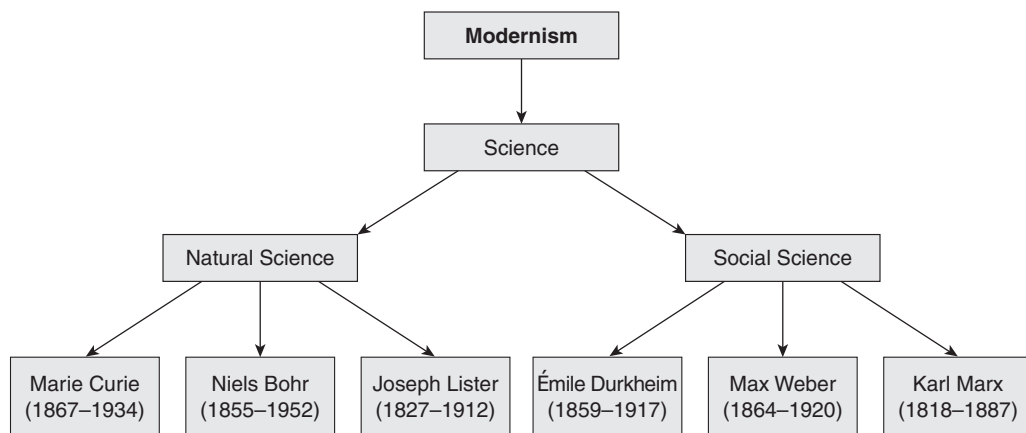
In this way, transcendent beliefs (faith) function affirmingly only to the extent they embody material conditions and promote realization of the self in conjunction with social interests. This means two things: First, the nomos as mediator between the individual and society functions in both directions, as both a top-down system of control and a bottom-up expression of real-life hopes and aspirations of real people. Second, social conflict becomes relevant, as we will see among the classical era theorists.

### Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406): The First Sociologist

Born in Tunis, Khaldun spent much of his professional life in Granada, Spain, and Alexandria, Egypt. Extensively educated, he wrote numerous histories and an autobiography. He also wrote a decisively sociological treatise, 400 years before sociology existed as such.

Rarely studied in the West, we may legitimately call Ibn Khaldun the first sociologist. Although the name “sociology” comes from Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Khaldun actually created many of the basic concepts of the field. In his brilliant work, *The Muqaddimah*, he coins concepts such as social force, social fact, group solidarity, and theories of material and ideological conflict, especially urban versus desert life, and the conflict of hierarchy based on economic and cultural domination. He also analyzes the decline of great civilizations. In all of this, religion plays a vital role in various ways. This is required reading for any serious student of social theory.

Berger draws significantly from three of the founders of sociology—Émile Durkheim, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. All three of these scholars studied, and were influenced by, modernity. Modernity is both a time period and a concept. As a time period, it refers to the rise of capitalism and rational (systematic) social organization, which begins to define society around 1500, becomes predominant around 1800, and continues today. As an analytical concept, this process of rational organization changed over time nearly all of society, including economics; government; education; knowledge; culture; and of course, religion. Regarding religion, the force of rationalization not only changed religion, but changed the way we look at it. Rationalized knowledge (in the form of science) allowed people like Neils Bohr and Marie Curie to study the natural world, and their contemporaries such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber to study other less tangible but no less real aspects of existence, such as religious devotion and beliefs (see Figure 1.2). Science enabled them to study religion in all its aspects as objective phenomena, and in so doing separate it from other forms of knowledge, especially from faith.



**Figure 1.2** Basic Branches of Science and Example Contributors



## Classical Theory

In all of sociology, the works of three famous foundational scholars of the field—Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim—are perhaps the most extensively misunderstood. In this section, we will cover their major works most relevant to religion by examining the primary texts rather than the secondary literature.

All three felt that science could be applied to social issues in the same way scientists had already applied it to the natural world. During their lives in the 19th and early 20th centuries, social science in general was a fledgling field, and no clear lines of demarcation had yet developed. Thus, Weber, for example, freely moves between history, social psychology, and what we might recognize today as sociology proper. Marx similarly combined philosophy, history, and economics. All three integrated whatever fields and insight they found relevant to the task at hand, and the task was to understand the massive social change and upheaval that the transition to modernity wrought. In this effort, they viewed their work in decisively moral terms, believing that clarity and accuracy matter, and that truthful insight is a moral obligation. For all three theorists, as we will see, one of the first and most significant casualties of modernity was religion. Once modernity seized control of the world, nothing would be the same anymore, especially not religion.

### Émile Durkheim

Émile Durkheim (1859–1917) argues that religion must provide a “collective effervescence” that celebrates the ideal social order of society. Whatever people believe is the correct and proper way to live, the established religion of that society will portray this order in the ultimate idealized form, as a divine order. The gods, or the one God, have ordained that we live as we already live. Faith in the divine is really then faith in human society, that in order to attain meaning and salvation, one must attain the right type and extent of social integration. Durkheim identified four forms of incorrect or insufficient socialization: egoism—integration is too weak; altruism—integration is too strong; anomie—integration is of a dysfunctional type that fails to regulate the individual; and fatalism—integration is a dysfunctional type that overregulates the individual. Of the four types, Durkheim argued that anomie would prove most relevant to religion in modern times. As religion loses its ability to create existential meaning, people become *anomic* (without a *nomos*). In this condition, people have no reason to regulate their desires, especially in the realm of economics and acquisition. Durkheim uses anomie in this sense, and not in the general sense of normlessness. The anomic person specifically lacks a sense of meaning and purpose, but may have other norms and values. As Durkheim argues, anomie is found most intensely in successful business executives, who have a powerful normative standard—making money and enjoying the thrill of power—but who lack a sense of meaning. In essence, Durkheim argues that money can buy property and thrills, but not happiness (see Durkheim [1897] 1951:247–250 and 253–257).

Today, we may think of this as consumerism, the idea that we work and spend and consume, always looking for the better deal, the bigger house, the bigger car, the

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bigger paycheck, the plasma TV, the surround sound stereo system. With natural desires, such as food, there are natural limits in that a person can only eat so much (although advertising and food companies always seek to expand our eating capacity). In contrast, socially created desires are essentially unlimited: there is always more money, more fame, more power, and more property to acquire, more thrills to experience. There is no natural limit to how much of these things we can accumulate. As of this writing, for example, the billionaire financier Kirk Kerkorian (b. 1917), at age 90, seeks to add more millions to his approximately \$15 *billion* in personal assets (Kroll and Fass 2007) by attempting to raid and dismantle Chrysler, General Motors, and other companies. How much money is enough?

Without a meaningful *nomos*, people lack a value system to set limits, and thus lose themselves in the endless and inherently unsatisfiable pursuit of bigger, better, and more of everything subtle and gross that modern society can offer for sale. In this social environment, even people become objects for consumption, and eventually all objects lose their flavor, importance, and ability to fascinate. People eventually find themselves surrounded by meaningless objects in a meaningless world. In its most extreme forms, anomie results in suicide, as a person faces feelings of exhaustion and hopelessness. The thrill is gone, and life feels empty.

Modernity thus differs significantly from earlier forms of society. In earlier forms, mechanical solidarity held society together by connecting people directly to each other. For Durkheim, mechanical solidarity meant the unity of sameness, that each person held more or less the same skills and significance as everyone else. The division of labor was generalized to the extent that each person, having similar skills, performs the same tasks in the community. Although some simple division of labor exists in such societies, especially a gender division of labor in that women do certain things and men do certain different things, all the women and all the men respectively do the same things. Mechanical solidarity promotes communal living, as no person possesses anything unique or different in terms of skills, knowledge, or property that could serve as a basis for domination.

As Margaret Mead ([1928] 2001) found in traditional Samoa, for example, or as Herbert Spencer ([1862] 2004) found among the Teutons in ancient Germany, claims to leadership depend on freely sharing skills and resources, not using resources for personal gain over and against others. Whether a peaceful society like traditional Samoa, or a war-and-plunder society like the Teutons, they both rely on mechanical solidarity, and thus a person claims the mantle of leadership based on sharing or achievement that benefits the collective rather than personal good. Homogeneity holds the community together. Religion reflects this homogeneity, makes sacred everything that maintains the mechanical solidarity, and makes profane everything that disrupts the cohesion of similarity.

In contrast, modern society dissolves mechanical solidarity because it converts individuals into specialists, each with a different position and function in society. The more modernism advances, the more specialized and therefore increasingly dissimilar people become. Just as mechanical solidarity produces sameness, a simple division of labor, so specialization produces difference and a complex division of labor. Yet people still depend on other people, and people must still cooperate with each other, even more so as they become more specialized. Whereas the

mechanical person possesses various skills, including a complete set of survival skills, the modern form of organization, which Durkheim refers to as organic solidarity, produces specialized parts, each of which depends vitally on the whole. As an individual, each person is only an incomplete part. As a whole, the various diverse parts come together in unison and constitute a society that is, in terms of its functions, far more complex than is possible in the mechanical form. But if everyone performs within various and diverse groups, each with its own requirements of skills, education, training, experience, and organization, how can people function as a unified whole? What brings all the various specialized parts together as a functioning organism?

Durkheim argues that on one level, economic interests provide a type of unity. However, he also argues that by themselves, economic interests, which manifest as laws, trade agreements, legal contracts, monetary exchanges, and the production of goods and services, only establish the relationship of people to objects, but not people to other people. This is a crucial problem in modern society, which elevates organic specialization to the highest degree. As Durkheim ([1893] 1984) writes, this kind of relationship “links things directly to persons, but not persons with one another. . . . Consequently, since it is only through the mediation of persons to things that people are integrated into society, the solidarity that arises from this integration is wholly negative” (p. 73). In other words, economic ties connect people through the objects that people seek to buy and sell, but this means solidarity is negative (passive) in the sense that it creates order, but only one of convenience. There is no positive (as in active) unity, or as Durkheim states it, there is “no cooperation, no consensus” on what is right and wrong, no solidarity between people, only momentary order based on mutual convenience. Economic ties, although vital to any society, cannot by themselves produce active *moral* cooperation and commitment to other people and to society. Especially in modern times, economic interests alone produce only intense self-centeredness and profound disconnection from other people.

Although modern society is decisively organic, some ancient civilizations developed organic solidarity as well. For example, in ancient Greece and Rome, religion served the main integrative function. Although not completely separated from class and status, Roman civilization developed a complex division of labor and relied on technical expertise of engineers, judges, governors, educators, and administrators of all types. A merchant and craftworking class also arose that created new opportunities for individual advancement. Religion permeated Roman society, and the rich pantheon of deities, each committed to particular locations, trades, ethnic groups, status groups, and many other unique groups, integrated Rome’s diversity into a more or less cooperative unity.

Although Roman society was clearly hierarchical, and elites often exploited the lower classes ruthlessly, religion nevertheless created positive (active) integration in the sense that it compelled individuals to serve interests beyond their own personal ones. These social interests could include the Roman state, the city, one’s peers, family, or any combination of commitments that transcended the individual. In short, people did not like every aspect of Roman society and conflict frequently occurred, but they accepted it overall as a meaningful order to life overall and thus respected and served that order.

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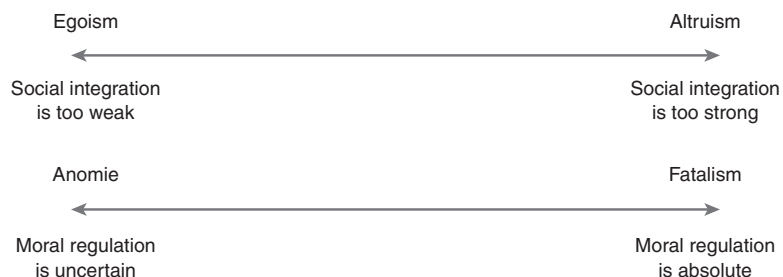
The early Christians serve as a useful example to illustrate Roman social morality. The contemporary scholar Robert Louis Wilken (2003) argues that the Romans did not hate the Christians, but rather distrusted them because they shunned all social activity that involved the pagan gods, which was nearly everything. This not only separated Christians from pagan religion, but from Roman society, which religion permeated and integrated. To intentionally reject the gods was to unintentionally reject the order of Roman society. As the great Roman statesman Cicero (Marcus Tullius Cicero, 106–43 BCE) wrote, “the disappearance of piety towards the gods will entail the disappearance of loyalty and social union among men as well, and of justice itself—the highest of all virtues” (Cicero [c. 40 BCE] 1960).

### Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE)

The man known to us as Cicero wrote on many topics, including religion. One of the most effective politicians and orators in Rome, he cherished and celebrated the Republic as many would celebrate religious devotion, and indeed, Cicero connected public service and democracy to true religious faith. He could not prove that democracy was a divine form of government, but he believed it nevertheless. His faith would cost him his life. Although offered power in the emerging imperial system, Cicero refused to compromise his devotion to democracy and justice under the law. Marcus Antonius (Mark Antony) ordered him assassinated, and Cicero’s alleged final words were, “There is nothing proper about what you are doing, soldier, but do try to kill me properly” (Cassius Dio, *Roman History*).

In Durkheim’s first book, *The Division of Labor in Society* (his dissertation; [1893] 1984), he proposes no institution to remedy the fractured relations of modern times. He concludes only that economics alone cannot positively integrate people, and to the extent we rely on economic interdependence, we create only anomic relations, that is, mutually beneficial relations that have no meaning beyond the transaction of the current purchase, or the momentary relations of working conditions.

In order to further understand the social problems of modern society, Durkheim empirically developed a sociological framework in *Suicide: A Study in Sociology* ([1897] 1951). He offers four famous concepts to explain different types of suicide—egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic (see Figure 1.3).



**Figure 1.3** Durkheim’s Problems of Social Integration

All derive from problems with social integration, although in different ways. For Durkheim, suicide includes all self-destructive behavior, such as substance abuse, and willingly joining the military to kill and be killed. Later in the book, he identifies homicide and suicide as identical, except that in the former the object to kill is external, whereas with suicide, the object is oneself. With this in mind, Durkheim examines the impact of various social institutions, including, family, education, and religion. In the case of religion, he rejects the notion that differences in beliefs explain the frequency of suicide. He observes that statistically, of the three religions common in Europe—Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism—Jews are lowest in frequency, then Catholics, with Protestants being the highest. Both Catholicism and Protestantism condemn suicide strongly. However, there is no official proscription against suicide in Judaism.

So why are the Jews the lowest in suicide frequency, when they don't even prohibit suicide as a sin? Durkheim ([1897] 1951) argues that

the beneficial influence of religion is therefore not due to the special nature of religious conceptions. If religion protects man against the desire for self-destruction, it is not that it preaches the respect for his own person . . . but because it is a society. . . . The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, and also the greater its preservative value. The details of dogmas and rites are secondary. The essential thing is that they are capable of supporting a sufficiently intense collective life. (p. 170)

Of the three religions, Protestantism allows the greatest individual investigation of scripture and requires the fewest obligatory observations. As a result, people are freer to explore their faith, and indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, Protestantism in the United States develops nearly unlimited variations. Yet this freedom also diminishes the regulatory power of religion, or in other words, it integrates the individual less powerfully into the collective identity. People may thus stray into egoism, where they become isolated both emotionally and socially. This isolation produces depression and despair.

Conversely, altruism results when the individual loses his or her individual identity completely in favor of the collectivity. In this case, the individual must be willing to do anything for the group, even if this means death. Sometimes it means killing oneself; sometimes killing others; or as we will see with religious terrorists, sometimes both together. In altruism, the individual life becomes inconsequential—only the group matters.

Often described as normlessness, anomie refers more exactly to a lack of meaningfully regulating normative values—in other words, the lack of a meaningful morality. Durkheim sees this type of dysfunction as most common in modern times. In order to open new markets and to increase consumption, modern capitalism must simultaneously break down personal inhibitions and social prohibitions—anything that might restrict consumption and infringe on profit. People must feel free to indulge in every vice, all manner of consumption, all types of new sensations and thrills. All three classical theorists in this chapter agree that,

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although desires may differ from one person to the next, the one desire all modern people share is that they want more—of anything and everything.

Durkheim observes that animals seek what their instinct tells them to seek—food, reproduction, and so on. Their needs have clear boundaries of satisfaction, and they do not obsess over what they don't have. They more or less automatically tend toward equilibrium in life, because their satisfaction is directly connected to and proportionate to their needs, the limits of which nature sets for them (although one of my cats definitely eats too much, and the other is quite insatiable for affection. That's what living with humans does to an otherwise noble animal.) However,

this is not the case with man, because most of his needs are not dependent on his body or not to the same degree. . . . How to determine the quantity of well-being, comfort or luxury legitimately to be craved by a human being? Nothing appears in man's organic nature nor in his psychological constitution which sets a limit to such tendencies. . . . Human nature is basically the same in all men, in its essential qualities. It is not human nature which can assign the limits necessary to our needs. They are thus unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone. (Durkheim [1897] 1951:247)

As social animals, we suffer no inherent regulation to our desires, and thus they are inherently unlimited. Those things of a social nature, such as money, fame, thrills, and power, are inherently unlimited; we can only eat so much food, but there is always more money, fame, and power to accumulate. Only society can set a limit on socially created desires, which it has done historically through religion. Although a higher class may enjoy a much better standard of living, with far more luxuries, religion has provided a meaningful justification for the established social order, and meaningful limits on what a person could or could not do. As Durkheim notes, the need is to establish meaningful and legitimate limits on desires, not just formal limits. People must find satisfaction, not just barriers.

The special problem in modern society, which capitalist values rule, is that "unlimited desires are insatiable by definition, and insatiability is rightly considered a sign of morbidity. Being unlimited . . . they cannot be quenched. Inextinguishable thirst is constantly renewed torture" (Durkheim [1897] 1951:247). Such people find themselves in a state of perpetual unhappiness, and "a thirst arises for novelties, unfamiliar pleasures, nameless sensations, all of which lose their savor once known" (p. 256). Hence their separation increases, and even the slightest decrease becomes an intolerable cataclysm. People want it all, and they want it now. They want more, and the more they seek, the less satisfaction they find. This produces feelings of desperation, despair, and self-destruction. Unfortunately, Durkheim feels that "religion has actually lost most of its power" to meaningfully regulate. In the absence of religion, modern capitalist society has in its place sanctified unlimited desires, "and by sanctifying them this apotheosis of well-being has placed them above all human law. Their restraint seems like a sort of sacrilege" (p. 255). Money and profit are the new gods.

The inverse of anomie is fatalism, where moral control so completely and absolutely governs life that it chokes off all longing and hope. Fatalism "is the suicide derived

from excessive regulation, that of persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked by oppressive discipline” (Durkheim [1897] 1951:276). In history, we often find that people will bear great burdens in the present if they feel that the future will be better, if not for themselves then at least for their children. To the extent religion can instill a sense of a better future, that is, a sense of hope, it successfully mitigates the effects of fatalism. As we will see in subsequent chapters, people will tolerate very little and more readily violate the established social order if they believe that the future will not be better, that is, if they lose a sense of hope.

Durkheim also addressed religion specifically in *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* ([1915] 1965). Whatever its doctrines, any particular religion must be able to create a meaningful social order and instill this order within the individual. Not only must the religion celebrate the present, the collective effervescence mentioned earlier, but it must also instill a sense of something larger that transcends the individual. Usually, this is the divine, the eternal, that which specifically cannot be observed directly.

### The Soul

The concept of a soul exists in many different religions and cultures.

**Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—the three monotheist religions,** derive from the same Abrahamic tradition, and their beliefs about the soul are highly similar. The soul exists separately from the body, and although it abides within the mortal body for a while, its existence is eternal. This concept derives most directly from Socrates (in Plato). The **ancient Greeks** also believed in an afterlife, although its quality varied greatly depending on one’s mortal life.

**Hindu** beliefs also vary greatly, but many believe that the *Jiva*, *Atman*, and *Purusha* are aspects of the divine that reside within each person. As in Christianity, it is eternal and indestructible.

**Animistic** religions are found throughout Africa, especially Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Gabon, and the Republic of Guinea Bissau; throughout Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Myanmar, and Papua New Guinea; as well as among Native Americans and Europeans in premodern times. They believe that life essence (anima) permeates all things, and often this essence develops a consciousness that not only transcends but also resides in the individual. Particular people, animals, plants, rocks, and so on are born, live, and die, but the animistic essence of life is eternal.

When religious people feel a rush of excitement, when they feel that God is near or within them, when they feel a power and intensity of belief, commitment, and the sanctity of moral regulation, they are not, as sociologists sometimes conclude, succumbing to an illusion. Religious devotion is not deception. Rather, Durkheim ([1915] 1965) says, “We can say that the believer is not deceived when he believes in the existence of a moral power upon which he depends and from which he perceives all that is best in himself” (p. 257). Yet let us remember that Durkheim seeks a sociological understanding of religion. Sociologically, he argues that this power

exists and it is real, but it is not God the person worships: “it is society.” However crude or sophisticated the imagery and beliefs of a religion may be, behind them “there is a concrete and living reality . . . [that] translates everything essential about life and the relations to be explained: for it is an eternal truth that outside of us there exists something greater than us, with which we enter into communion” (p. 257). God is society, or at least society in an idealized form.

Furthermore, religion not only regulates behavior through morality, but also shapes and defines people. It makes us into something, into what society requires that we become in order to live within its parameters, and in order to serve the collective order. It does this symbolically and metaphorically, through rituals, sacraments, and scripture. Religion shapes people at the highest or eternal level of understanding, yet since society must consist of people, this collective and transcendent sense can only exist if real people feel it and believe it. In religious conception, the transcendent aspect of ourselves is the soul.

Sociologically, Durkheim interprets the soul as a social construct, as something that exists both separately from and within the individual. The soul has a dualistic nature in which one part is essentially impersonal and serves the collective interest of the group. Yet people are at the same time individuals, and the soul consequently has a second aspect, an earthly aspect tied to and in accordance with each individual body, and it is therefore also personal. The soul is eternal, but lives at least for a time in individual bodies, and thus we are all one people and members of society, yet also individuals. Both the collectivity and the individual are sacred.

Expressed more sociologically, “a person is not merely a single subject distinguished from all the others. It is rather a being to which is attributed a relative autonomy in relation to the environment with which it is most immediately in contact” (Durkheim [1915] 1965:306). Furthermore, the belief in a soul allows a person to meaningfully integrate personal experiences and thoughts with that of society, and this frees the individual from isolation and the inherent natural limits on life—that is, we all die. In order to make sense of life and death, we must oppose individual and natural frailty with collective and social strength.

Yet consistent with his earlier analysis in *Suicide*, Durkheim distinguishes individuality as a quality of being from *individuation*, a process by which a person becomes dissimilar from other people. Individuality is simply the ability to think and feel as a particular person, whereas individuation disconnects a person from collective meaning and generates anomie. As Durkheim ([1915] 1965) writes, “passion individuates, yet it also enslaves. Our sensations are essentially individual; yet we are more personal the more we are able to think and act with social concepts” (p. 308). In other words, thoughts can be shared through concepts, but passion can only be felt at the individual level, which makes it antisocial. For Durkheim, religion is a civilizing force because it elevates the intellect over passion. Even the passion of ecstatic rites occurs within socially defined parameters. Use of hallucinogenic substances, for example, or overt sexual displays; flagellation; or sacrifices, whether animal or human, do not promote a loss of control, but rather, place the passions under religious, and thus social, regulation.

Overall then, Durkheim argues that religion must establish boundaries: on one side those things crucial for the health and well-being of the community—the



sacred; on the other side those things that are inherently detrimental to the community—the profane. There can also be a third area, the mundane, which is a kind of neutral territory or gray area that is neither essential nor detrimental inherently. Let us be clear, though, that Durkheim offers a sociological perspective, not a theological one. For Durkheim, evil and profane are not synonymous. Rather, the profane addresses whatever is both threatening to and outside of society. Evil may be both outside and part of society. As Durkheim ([1915] 1965) explains,

Things are arbitrarily simplified when religion is seen only on its idealistic side. In its way, religion is realistic. There is no physical or moral ugliness, there are no vices or evils that do not have a special divinity. There are gods of theft and trickery, of lust and war, of sickness and death. Even Christianity itself, however so high the ideal of which it has made divinity to be, has been obliged to give the spirit of evil a place in its mythology. Satan is an essential piece of the Christian system; even if he is an impure being, he is not a profane one. The anti-god is still a god, inferior and subordinated, it is true, but nevertheless endowed with extended powers. . . . Thus religion, far from ignoring the real society and making abstraction of it, is in its image; it reflects all its aspects, even the most vulgar and the most repulsive. (p. 468)

In this passage, Durkheim clarifies that religion reflects all aspects of society, not only the idealistic or most desirable parts. In this sense, he says, religion is realistic. Yet it must always extend the possibility of hope, no matter how powerful the negative aspects may appear. The positive must always triumph, if not now then in a vision of the future, or else life would be impossible.

Religion does, however, idealize society, in the sense that it immortalizes the structure and conflicts of the present. It projects the present back into prehistory, and extends it forward into eternity. Just as society is immortal, in that it precedes and outlives the individual and therefore transcends the mundane, so religion similarly surpasses the moment. In its representation of both good and evil, religion encompasses the individual and makes us part of something larger and more important, and thereby makes our lives more important. Religion brings about “a state of effervescence which changes the condition of psychological activity.” When a person embraces the beliefs and practices of one’s religion, “a man does not recognize himself; he feels transformed and consequently he transforms the environment which surrounds him” (Durkheim [1915] 1965:468–469). Religion not only connects people to society and to each other, but it also inspires and empowers people to achievement in this reality. Far more than just a collection of absurd ideas and abstract faith as Tertullian suggested, Durkheim sees a powerful social and material basis behind the ideas of religion.

Yet this is not a crude materialism, meaning that religious ideals are more than just a straightforward representation of material conditions. Ideals are also real when people think them and behave accordingly. Although no idea can survive long if people do not affirm it in practice, neither can material relations endure when they lose legitimacy and especially when they lose a moral foundation. Durkheim sees religious beliefs as a kind of theory about the meaning of life, and just like a

scientific theory, it must be understandable, and it must have practical application with discernable effects.

Although Karl Marx predated Durkheim, we will consider his work next, because he adds an additional dimension to the sociology of religion that follows logically from Durkheim.

### **Karl Marx (1818–1887)**

One of the most misunderstood people in history, Marx was never the rabid revolutionary that later self-identified Marxists and anti-Marxists would portray him as. True, Marx sometimes wrote quite incendiary tracts against capitalism, and he did participate in the Revolution of 1848, but the vast majority of his work is very dense and scholarly. Marx seriously and carefully considers the nuances of modern capitalist society, regarding its impact on economic relations and the well-being of humanity, including spiritual well-being.

Very similar to Durkheim, Marx accepts that established religion legitimates the established order of society. However, this is only one type of religion for Marx, an oppressive type. The other is a revolutionary type.

In the oppressive type, religion not only legitimates the established order of society, but in doing so, legitimates the domination and exploitation of one class over and against the others. A *class* is determined by the relationship to the means of production, or, in other words, whether a person owns income-producing property or not. Those who own income-producing property therefore become the ruling class, because they own the property that produces livelihood. Other classes may be salaried types with considerable job autonomy, such as professionals (doctors, lawyers, professors, engineers) or wage earners with much less autonomy, such as factory workers or service employees, like cable TV installers or FedEx drivers. Either way, these people do not own income-producing property, and must therefore sell their ability to work to the owners. They do not work for themselves, but for the owners, who pay them only part of the value they create. Marx calls this economic or class exploitation. For example, when factory workers produce cars, they don't get paid the full value of the cars they produce, but only a part of the value. The company keeps the rest in the form of profit.

This is how Marx sees capitalism, or any system based on economic, that is, class inequality. In this context, religion legitimates the class order. It teaches people not only to accept, but also to celebrate their subordination and exploitation. It teaches people that their place is correct and proper, whether owner or worker. In other words, Marx argues that oppressive religion teaches people how to bear their burdens in life, not how to overthrow them. Whether in monotheistic Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, or in polytheistic Hinduism or ancient paganism, or in atheistic Buddhism and Shintoism, or in many other religions, oppressive forms maintain the established social order.

In contrast, revolutionary religion legitimates challenging, changing, or replacing the established social order when it no longer serves the interests of the people. To adapt a phrase from Abraham Lincoln, revolutionary religion is "by the people and for the people," whereas oppressive religion is by and for the elite. In simplest

terms, think of the difference as top-down religion (oppressive) versus bottom-up (revolutionary) religion.

Let us look at Marx more closely. His thoughts on religion appear throughout his work, but especially in the earlier work. Economics always occupied a central place for Marx, but never separately from existential concerns. Humans need more than just material satisfaction; they also need spiritual sustenance, something to make life worth living. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* ([1844] 1978b), Marx sees a direct connection between the issues of philosophy and the issues of economics. From philosophy, Marx draws existential concerns about the essence of existence and the meaning of life, which determine our emotional and spiritual satisfaction. From economics, Marx draws issues of production and material satisfaction. Marx finds existential and material concerns interconnected and both equally vital for human life. Modern society can no longer harmonize the facts of daily living and economic activity with spiritual needs. As Marx writes, “with the increasing value of the world of things, of commodities, proceeds in direct proportion the devaluation of the world of men” (p. 71). This basic observation arguably underlies all of Marx’s theory, including his views on religion. Capitalism cherishes the commodity—the product that is produced for sale—above all other concerns. The more important commodities become, the less important our humanity becomes. The commodity-driven society, the capitalist society, creates an inherent separation between people and what Marx calls our “species-being,” or in other words, all the things that define what it means to be human.

Nature endows some of these uniquely human characteristics, and society some others. Capitalism separates people from both their natural essence and their social essence, and transforms an essentially social species into isolated individuals, separate from nature and from each other. Although humans in capitalism continue to interact for economic purposes (namely, work and consumption), the commodity relationship negates the deeper, spiritual experiences. In other words, capitalism estranges or alienates (Marx uses both words, *entfremdung* and *verfremdung*, respectively in German) humans from “external nature and our spiritual essence, our human being” (Marx [1844] 1978b:77). We become estranged or alienated from ourselves, from other people, from nature, from work, from everything that is important and necessary for a meaningful life, including alienation from God. Just as other people, the natural world, work, and even our bodies appear as something separate from us, as something entirely external to us, so we also see the alienated God as something external, as something that commands us from above, whose interests stand over and against our own interests as people. God becomes the taskmaster, the overbearing and unknowable boss whom we must serve without question, or who appears disconnected from real life. Thus begins Marx’s critique of alienated religion, the necessary outcome in a society that places profits over people.

In the *Theses on Feuerbach* ([1845]1978c), Marx critiqued the theoretical atheist Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872) who wrote a book called *Das Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*), in which Feuerbach argues that Christianity has become nothing more than a set of fixed beliefs and empty rituals. It has long since departed from the main course of history. He also argued a subjectivist position that God must arise from within, not as an imposition from some remote

above-and-beyond abstraction. Marx does not contest these points. Rather, Marx argues that because Feuerbach relies on a subjective interpretation of religion, and thus endows it with a subjective essence, he fails to see the fundamentally social essence of religion. Whatever form religion takes, it is essentially social in origin, not subjective. Marx writes that “Feuerbach resolves the religious essence into the human essence. But the individual essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of social relations” and furthermore that “Feuerbach . . . does not see that religion is itself a social product” (p. 145). If capitalism produces alienated social relations, then religion, as a product of social relations, also takes on an alienated form. Yet religion need not take an alienated form.

A common misconception about Marx’s theory of religion stems from one famous passage from an introductory essay intended for inclusion in a much larger critique of Hegel’s (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich von Hegel, 1770–1831), *Philosophy of Right*. The often-quoted phrase that religion “is the opium of the people” (Marx [1844] 1978a:54) refers to religion in capitalist society specifically, not to religion in general. As with any quote from any writer, context is decisive. If we consider the full context of Marx’s comments, we will see an important qualification, namely, that Marx draws a distinction between otherworldly religion, which is oppressive because it directs people to an ideal vision based on a nonexistent god, and the possibility of an alternative, this-worldly religion that arises from actual lived experience, and correspondingly offers emancipatory potential to the extent it validates the lives of oppressed people and leads a revolutionary sentiment to overthrow oppressive conditions of this world. Marx saw religion as both a specific and general theory of the world ([1844] 1978a:53) that maintains social order through morals, customs, rituals, and belief about how the world ought to be. It connects the individual to established social order, and furthermore, justifies the established order as sacred and therefore inviolate. To rebel against society is to rebel against the divine.

From a materialist standpoint, present-day religion reflects an inverted social order, in which those who own property or hold title stand over those who work and actually build society. Since conscious realization of this inversion is intolerable to any hierarchy, religion places the Truth of existence beyond the grasp of real people, and into the hands of a supreme and unreachable being, into the hands of God, whose earthly representation is the church, or more generally in sociological terms, religion. Since religion, like any other institution, is naturally a socially constructed entity, the “struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly a struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion” (Marx [1844] 1978a:54). Thus, the struggle is against religion that supports—or fails to challenge—the established order of and suffering in this world. To the extent religious devotion is a form of compensatory satisfaction, Marx maintains that “religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering” (p. 54). It is thus not simply a drug (an opium) or a diversion, but a type of insurance against popular discontent, and at the same time, an expression of the very same discontent and suffering.

However much oppressive religion may disempower or pacify the masses, it also embodies their discontent. Class hierarchy cannot justify itself; it requires some other transcendent legitimization, whether God, Nature, the Nation, or some other

higher power. However, Marx believes this condition cannot persist indefinitely as real-life suffering increases.

Despite the potential of religion to thwart political, economic, legal, and social change in general, religion nevertheless corresponds directly to real dissatisfaction, to real suffering that arises from the inequality of life:

Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the sentiment of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. . . . The abolition of the illusory happiness of men, is a demand for their real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions is a call to abandon the conditions which require illusions. (Marx [1844] 1978a:54)

The crucial point then follows that the task of the revolutionary is, “once the other-world of truth has vanished, to establish the truth of this world,” and furthermore, to “unmask human self-alienation in its secular form now that it has been unmasked in its sacred form” (Marx [1844] 1978a:54). Marx addresses the criticism of religion toward those religious institutions that mask the suffering of this world, that maintain the oppression of this world for the sake of a supposed truth from the “other world” when in reality, the ruling class projects its legitimacy through religion in order to maintain its material advantage.

Rather than a general broadside and universal condemnation, Marx’s attack on religion seems particularly focused in that he criticizes the role of religion within particular social contexts, with particular social ramifications. He does not condemn all religion simply for being religious. For Marx, religion becomes oppressive to the extent that it presents a universal and eternal truth over which an omnipotent and implacable Divinity presides. In this context, humans can only submit to such formidable power, and in turn, people can only submit to the authority of the real world. In this way, idealism dominates social life, such that real lives of real people become irrelevant. Instead, Marx advocates a materialist religion based on conditions in the real world, as opposed to ideal religion based on the prerogatives of nonexistent deities.

In modern society, religion shields the secular relations of capitalism from critical scrutiny, so that morality and the meaning of life appear entirely separate from economic issues, especially economic injustice. Yet for Marx, they are all social and species issues, all essential to human physical and spiritual well-being; they cannot be conveniently separated.

## Max Weber (1864–1920)

On the assertion that economics as the basis of material fulfillment and religion as the basis of spiritual fulfillment are inextricably connected and fundamentally social, Weber entirely agrees with Marx. Regarding the *Protestant Ethic* book in particular (discussed in this section), some sociologists see Weber as an idealist, compared to Marx the materialist. Supposedly, Weber argues that values and ideas lead to social change. Regarding the power of ideas, Weber ([1905] 2002) clearly states that all of the values and ideas associated with modern society

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acquired their present-day significance as a result of the connection to the capitalist organization of work. . . . Hence, all of these new ideas would never have significantly influenced the social structure and all the problems associated with it specific to the modern West. Exact calculation, the foundation for everything else, is possible only on the basis of formally free labor. (pp. 156–157)

Like Marx, Weber sees a material basis to all of the definitive aspects of modern society.

Weber developed a type of applied sociology that looks at religion both as an institution of social order and as one of social change. In his lifetime, he published two great works on religion: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ([1905] 2002), and *Ancient Judaism* ([1919] 1967)—the last work shortly before he died. In both, Weber studies the conflict between forces of order, and forces of change. In the *Protestant Ethic*, Weber argues that, in order for modern society to develop, forces of rationalization transformed the old, traditional forms of religion into a strict code of conduct for daily life in the form of asceticism (Puritanism). In *Ancient Judaism*, Weber examines the impact of charismatic authority on social change, which almost always appears in a religious form.

One of the greatest misunderstandings about Weber's theory is that most of his concepts are ideal types. As the name suggests, the ideal type is a purified concept that includes all the elements that Weber considers decisive (*entscheidend*) and eliminates all the elements that are related but not essential. Weber distills the ideal-type concept from real-type observations, but the ideal type does not exist in a pure form. Rather, Weber uses it as a basis of comparison, as a touchstone to analyze the extent to which any given real case fits the ideal-type concept. All of his most famous concepts, whether they pertain to religion or not, are ideal types. Unfortunately, many sociologists assume that Weber intends the ideal type to be a real type, which is clearly not the case if one actually reads Weber.

For example, one of his most controversial concepts (ideal types) is the ascetic Protestant, which we will consider in detail below. Basically, Weber argues that in the 1500s, a new religious type emerged, which he calls Protestant asceticism, also known simply as asceticism or Puritanism. Among other things, this includes a denial of pleasure, and a new attitude toward work, a work ethic that commends hard work and condemns laziness. Endless work becomes a moral requirement and nonproductive free time a great sin. Weber clearly states that ascetic Protestantism is an analytical tool, and not a literal description of real beliefs and practices. He identifies four main branches of asceticism, with Calvinism as first and most important. The three others are Pietism, Methodism, and the various sects that developed out of the Baptist movement. Each of these denominations actually includes many sects—for example, Calvinism includes the Dutch Reformed Church, English Puritanism, and Presbyterianism.

Perhaps the most important sociological point is that “none of these carriers of ascetic Protestantism were absolutely separate from any of the others, and the distinction in comparison to the non-ascetic churches of the Reformation cannot be strictly maintained” (Weber [1905] 2002:53). In other words, these are analytical

concepts as much as real religious distinctions. Various elements of asceticism, as discussed below, are found throughout the different ascetic denominations, but none of the real denominations exhibits all the aspects of asceticism in a pure form. Moreover, the nonascetic denominations include some elements of asceticism, but they are sufficiently different to warrant a different conceptual categorization. Even traditional Catholicism requires some ascetic practices, such as no meat on Friday and giving up certain luxuries during Lent. The vast majority of the time, however, Catholicism relegated Puritanism to the monasteries, where particular individuals devoted their lives to austerity in order to approach God in a pure and uncorrupted form at all times. The general masses instead lived in a cycle of sin and redemption, regularly enjoying the pleasures of life and atoning for them at the appropriate times. Weber thus sees the Catholic Church as the embodiment of traditional society—a society that does things as they have always been done.

As such, the Catholic Church involved mystical beliefs and rites, such as transubstantiation (the belief that the bread and wine of the Eucharist transform into the body and blood of Christ). Catholicism also involved various traditional celebrations throughout the year, which coincided with changing seasons, and which the church had often assimilated from earlier pagan festivals. The Christmas tree for Saxon pagans represented light and life awaiting rebirth in the darkness of winter, and Easter eggs and rabbits for Celtic pagans represented fertility, as well as the celebration of Easter, which represented life emerging from winter. Halloween and Day of the Dead also correspond to pagan beliefs that the veil between this world and the next is thinnest in late autumn, a time of dying, when nature goes dormant. These examples, and many others, speak to the mystery of life, death, and the afterlife.

**Table 1.2** Traditionalism Versus Rational Asceticism

<i>Traditionalism</i>	<i>Rational Asceticism</i>
<b>Cycle of Life</b> —People live in ongoing sin and redemption; sin is forgivable.	<b>Constant Vigilance</b> —Sin must be consciously avoided at all times; sins only accumulate.
<b>Eudaemonism</b> —People live as they are accustomed, neither seeking pleasure nor avoiding it, but living as familiar and comfortable.	<b>Puritanism</b> —Pleasure of any kind must be consciously avoided at all times. Work in the calling is the only moral behavior.
<b>Forgiving and Loving God</b> —God loves everyone and it is never too late to atone for transgressions. God favors the meek; to whom more is given, more is expected.	<b>Harsh and Judgmental God</b> —God detests the weak and lazy. God favors the strong and bold; all must work hard whether blessed with gifts or not.
<b>Salvation Through Christ</b> —Jesus died for everyone willing to strive toward righteousness.	<b>Salvation Through Predestination</b> —Only the predestined are saved, all others are damned, and no action can change one's outcome.

### *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber examines the rise of ascetic (Puritanical) Protestantism in the 1500s–1700s. Through this period, Weber sees ascetic Protestantism as a force of rationalization in European religion. Ascetics included various particular denominations, such as Baptists, Methodists, Pietists, Quakers, and most importantly, Calvinists. John Calvin (1509–1564) introduced two notions that Weber argues reshaped the ethics of Western civilization, and in so doing contributed to the development of full modernity. On the road to modernity, Protestantism introduced *rationalization* into daily life, which in this sense means to make something calculable and predictable, to make something systematic, to demystify something. As Weber terms it, it means the disenchantment of the world. It made everyday life systematic in order to fulfill the word of God.

In order to live a life pleasing God and to systematically avoid sin, Weber identifies a new ethic, which he calls the “Protestant work ethic.” Work becomes far more than a means of survival, or even a means to fulfill the obligations into which a person is born. For Calvin and other versions of asceticism, work becomes the means to salvation. One should work hard not just because one’s livelihood depends on it, but because the soul depends on it. With this in mind, a person must studiously and consistently pursue a calling, not just from time to time, but constantly and systematically. A person must live free from sin in the calling at all times. Asceticism as the manifestation of the rationalization of life not only transforms work, but every moment of every day into a matter of ultimate importance. Of course, this means that a person must give up luxuries of all types, even though through hard work the individual may earn a lot of money. A person must save money or reinvest it in business, not spend it on luxuries.

For Weber, though, the importance of asceticism is not the beliefs as such, but rather, that asceticism represents a rationalization of religion and of society. Ascetic Protestantism has the effect of demystifying Western Christianity, and as its work ethic became increasingly mainstream, it shaped work and life in general into a form that emphasizes and rewards efficiency and diligence. It eliminated mysteries such as transubstantiation and the magic of confession, and replaced them with systematic behavior.

#### Religion

Ascetic Protestantism → Ascetic values → Predestination → Individual judgment

#### Modern Social Order

1. Individual outcome
2. Deferral of gratification
3. Routinized lifestyle
4. Work ethic

#### Economics

Capitalism → Wage labor → Individual wages → Individual success or failure

**Figure 1.4** The Elective Affinity of Asceticism and Capitalism



As the illustration in Figure 1.4 shows, the rationalization of life occurred in two different and initially separate spheres, in economics and in religion. For Weber, the Catholic Church represented traditionalism, the value system that people should live as they have always lived, that life is an ongoing cycle of seasons, of celebrations, of sin and redemption. In contrast, ascetic Protestantism introduced the rationalization of life, that every moment must serve a purpose, and that purpose is to serve God's will. Asceticism follows from predestination and the calling. The calling refers to the belief that God calls everyone to serve some purpose, to fulfill some part of God's plan. This plan remains known only to God, and people must obey, not question, and not shirk the responsibilities of the calling. Secondly, predestination teaches that since God is all-knowing (omniscient), He has already decided whom He will save and whom He will damn to hell. There is no way to change this. No priest can intervene, and neither can another person, community, or god. For the Calvinists and their English branch, the Puritans, Jesus died only for the elect, not for everyone. Each person thus stands entirely alone before a harsh and unforgiving God.

Yet God requires that all people obey Him, and since no one knows who belongs to the elect, everyone must live a moral life that pleases God at all times. In ascetic Protestantism, sins are cumulative; they cannot be forgiven or atoned for as in Catholicism. Thus, a person must live an ascetic life, that is, a life that denies all ease and pleasure. In traditional Christianity, Weber sees instead a eudaemonistic ethic—that people merely live the easiest life possible, not a hedonistic life, which is the pursuit of pleasure. Asceticism, also referred to as Puritanism, requires that people avoid any kind of gratification, even emotional gratification. Emotional release such as crying, or displays of joy and sorrow, confer pleasure; it feels good to release pent-up emotions. People should sleep on boards, for example, because a mattress confers unnecessary comfort, and people should not eat meat, because big steaks with a nice rind of fat taste good. Boiled vegetables and legumes, free of spice and devoid of flavor, suffice to provide adequate nutrients to live. People require only nutritious, not savory foods. The current popular belief that a firm, hard mattress is healthier than a soft mattress is more religious than medical; soft mattresses are sinful pleasures. Notice that from a medical standpoint, people with back problems use a soft, memory foam mattress that conforms to the contours of the body. In short, traditionalism teaches that wine is proof that God wants us to be happy; asceticism teaches that wine is proof that the devil is in the world. Matters of style and taste, as well as recreational activity, interfere with a moral life, a life focused solely on fulfilling God's will.

How can a person avoid pleasure at all times? In traditional Catholicism, they can't. The Church expected people to confess their sins and atone for their wrongs periodically, and then the cycle of sin and redemption starts over. Basically, the medieval and Renaissance Church divided the entire year into days of feast, and days of fast—days of pleasure, and days of atonement. Yet for the ascetics, a life free from sin at all times was required. How to avoid pleasure at all times?

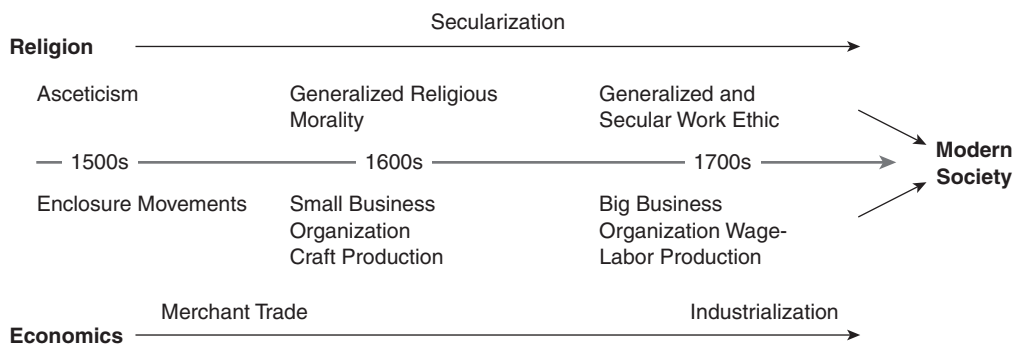
One word: work. Although not an end in itself, work provides the means to avoid sinful thoughts and actions. If one focuses solely on work, then one will not drift off into sin. As the old sayings go, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop," and

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“Early to bed and early to rise.” Work is a morally neutral activity, neither devout nor sinful in itself, but pleasing to God if the person works in the calling. In that case, work becomes an obligation; it is not a means of atonement, but rather, the basic activity that God requires of all people, for even the damned are called to fulfill some divine purpose.

Everyone must work, whether saved or damned, and none may know whether they are saved or damned. This ethic began in the ascetic Protestant sects in the 1500s, but by the 1600s, it had become a generalized religious ethic, and by the 1700s, a generalized—and secular—social ethic. Weber quotes Benjamin Franklin from the 1700s, and argues that Franklin sees ascetic hard work no longer as a religious value, but as a utilitarian social value. One should be thrifty with money, for example, because it makes practical sense to save for a rainy day, or one should be honest in order to build a solid reputation, because a solid reputation furthers one’s career. Nowhere does Franklin mention God’s will. For Weber, Franklin served as an example that the values of asceticism, namely dedication to work, had lost their particularly religious association, and had become a generalized and secular social ethic. In other words, it had become the value system of modern capitalist society (see Figure 1.5). The notion that one should work hard and that each person bears sole responsibility for his or her own outcome in life no longer involves God and salvation in the next life, but rather material success or failure in this life.

Religion thus contributes directly to the rise of the modern capitalist order, by providing its value system and by justifying the destruction of traditional obligations. No longer could or should people depend on their village or community for assistance, or for joy. Each person now stood alone, individually responsible for personal success or failure. The emerging wage system separated people from their traditional social role and placed them, as individuals, among other individuals. Puritanism transformed work into a conscious choice, rather than a traditional obligation. Whether a farmer, blacksmith, cooper (barrel-maker), fletcher (arrow-maker), tanner, fuller (felt-maker), or any other tradesperson, a man followed the path of his forebears, not his own choices. In traditionalism, people were born into their roles, and although most people lived at a relatively low socioeconomic level,



**Figure 1.5** Rationalization of Social Values and Economics

and the unsystematic nature of production often proved unreliable, traditional society had one great advantage—existential certainty. No one doubted his or her place in this life, or the next. Should a person stumble occasionally, the church and the community were there to help and comfort them.

In modern capitalism, Weber argues that the work ethic contributed to the destruction of the traditional communities, including the church congregations. Although it freed people from often oppressive traditional obligations, and enabled the peasant to rise above the misfortune of birth, it also introduced a great problem—existential uncertainty. The ramification of this is that despite worldly success in terms of money, fame, power, and property, people are cast adrift. In this regard, Weber ([1905] 2002) describes a very bleak social and psychological landscape:

The Puritan wanted to be a person with a vocational calling; today we are forced to be. . . . Tied to the technical and economic conditions at the foundation of mechanical and machine production, this cosmos today determines the style of life of all individuals born into it. . . . This pulsating mechanism does so with overwhelming force. Perhaps it will continue to do so until the last ton of fossil fuel has burned to ashes. According to Baxter, the concern for material goods should lie upon the shoulders like a “lightweight coat that could be tossed off at any given time.” Yet fate allowed a steel-hard casing to be forged from this coat. (p. 123)

In an old translation, Talcott Parsons renders *stahlhartes Gehäuse* as “iron cage” rather than the more exact “steel-hard casing” in this translation by Weber scholar Stephen Kalberg. In defense of Parsons, I would say that his translation is more poetic compared to Kalberg’s, which is more technical.

Perhaps the most misunderstood concept in sociology, Weber describes the “concern for material goods” as a “steel-hard casing” (or iron cage). Material goods, or what Marx termed commodities, govern our lives and encase us inescapably. Material goods, once a light cloak that could be thrown off nonchalantly, have become a steel-hard casing. The market and commodities, rather than religion, rule us now. By the way, many sociologists believe that “steel-hard casing” or “iron cage” refers to bureaucracy. This begs the question, Does that interpretation make sense in the context of religion and economics?

Weber ([1905] 2002) continues, saying that capitalism no longer requires the devotion that asceticism generates, because capitalism has become self-sustaining. As he elaborates,

The pursuit of gain, in the region where it has become most completely unchained and stripped of its religious-ethical meaning, the United States, tends to be associated with purely competitive passions. Frequently, these passions directly imprint this pursuit with the character of a sporting contest. (p. 124)

In colloquial terms, whoever dies with the most toys wins. Unfortunately, we fail to realize the vacancy of our petty little lives, pathetically devoted to buying things. Weber ([1905] 2002) concludes that “No one any longer knows who will live in this

steel-hard casing and whether entirely new prophets or a mighty rebirth of ancient ideas and ideals” will occur (p. 124). That is, new leaders may introduce new religious zeal, or on the other hand we might rediscover and cherish the ideas and values of old. Or we might just as likely become rigid and frozen in time, forever dedicated to the commodity system, “with a sort of rigidly compelled sense of self-importance . . . narrow specialists without mind, pleasure-seekers without heart; in its conceit, this nothingness imagines it has climbed to a level of humanity never before attained” (p. 124).

The modern world is a great nothingness, a great cultural and spiritual wasteland that consists of mindless and heartless consumers, forever dedicated to making and spending money in pursuit of mindless pleasures.

However, Weber sees another powerful force in history, which one usually encounters in a religious context—charisma.

### *Charisma*

Weber borrows the concept of charisma from Rudolf Sohm, and it refers to the belief that a person or thing possesses supernatural, transcendent powers. For Weber, charisma never really exists; it is only a belief, but to the extent that people accept the belief and act accordingly, they endow the person or thing with absolute power, the power of a god. In his book *Ancient Judaism* ([1919] 1967), Weber studies the prophets of the Old Testament, and sees them as a charismatic force that challenges established Hebrew law and traditions. Their claim to authority is *charismatic*, that God has endowed them with a special message and chosen them specifically to deliver it. If people accept a charismatic claim as valid, then that claim overrides all established authority, because God overrides all human establishments.

Overall, Weber concludes that charisma is an unpredictable and dangerous force, because it relies entirely on feeling and emotion. Moreover, it derives its power from intensity of emotion, and usually involves intense love of one thing, such as God, and intense hatred of another thing, the great Evil. Whereas rational decision making and behavior change the world through observation and logical planning, charisma changes the world through emotional intensity and devotion, the results of which can be unpredictable. Rationality seeks measured material change, whereas charisma seeks unrestrained idealistic change and emotional gratification.

The real, material world will only change so much and only so far; reality has inherent limits. What limits can there be to something like emotional gratification?

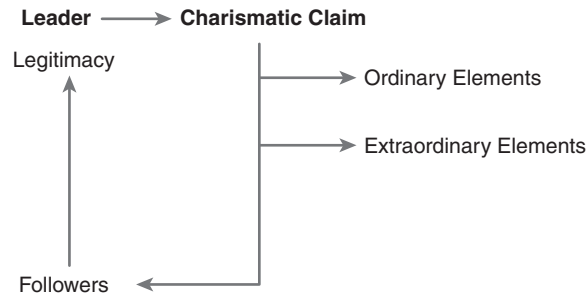
In the unfinished manuscript that we know today as *Economy and Society*, Weber (1978) sees rationality as “structures of everyday life” that revolve around the economy. That is, both “are concerned with normal want satisfaction” (Vol. 2, p. 1111) which in this context means material satisfaction—food, shelter, and security, for example. Those things that fall outside of rationality find fulfillment in an entirely different manner, that is, “on a charismatic basis” (p. 1111). Sometimes, people attempt to fulfill very real material necessities, such as food, shelter, and security, through irrational means, through charismatic means. This occurs especially in times of social turmoil and uncertainty.

As recent research shows, this often takes the form of rapid social change that causes people to reconsider values that seemed to be eternal. Especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Laquer (1996) finds a sudden upsurge in neofascist and reactionary clerical membership. Similarly, Lamy (1996) finds an upsurge in specifically American millennialism and doomsday cults. However, both researchers point out that contemporary groups typically reshuffle the ideology and myths from earlier times, in an attempt to interpret the rapid social and political changes of the present day. For example, Satan is no longer threatening the United States in the form of the Soviet Union, but now through vast networks of satanic cults is converting teenagers to gang life, drug use, violence, and destruction of the family (Victor 1993). We are now one step closer to the apocalypse as Satan brings the battle closer to home (Lamy, 1996). Although rock music, especially heavy metal, has long been thought of as “evil” and the cause of delinquency (Verden, Dunleavy, and Powers 1989), it becomes literally the “sounds of Satan” for some in the face of job loss and political change (Weinstein 1991, 2000).

When social problems intensify, Weber sees two primary responses: on the one hand reason, and on the other hand faith—the basis of charisma. Each, however, defines the problem and works for solutions in entirely different ways. Reason “alters the situations of life and hence its problems” (Weber 1978, Vol. 1:245) which means that reason attempts to rectify the causes of the problem by making some concrete change in society based on empirical observation and analysis. In direct contrast, charisma does not address the causes of social problems through empirical analysis, but rather seeks “a subjective or internal reorientation . . . in a radical alteration of the central attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation” (p. 245). More specifically, “charisma, in its most potent forms, disrupts rational rule as well as tradition altogether and overturns notions of sanctity.” Charismatic authority plays on the emotions and beliefs of people; as Weber (1978) says, “it enforces the inner subjection to the unprecedented and absolutely unique” power which is charisma (Vol. 2, p. 1117). Essentially, “the power of charisma rests upon the belief in revelation and heroes” (p. 1116). As such, it attempts to alleviate social problems through magical means, and those who claim leadership or the ability to correct social problems on the basis of charisma, claim this power of magic or divine endowment (see Figure 1.6).

In summary, reason defines the problem and seeks solutions based on logic and observation. Charisma defines problems based on emotion; it creates “change” by changing the way people interpret the problem. As Weber argues, charisma appeals to inner emotion and psychic disposition. Thus, its ability to actually manage daily affairs and solve social problems is incidental. As God says to the villager in *The Good Woman of Szechuan*, by Bertolt Brecht ([1943] 1999), the neighboring village flooded because the dam was not maintained properly, not because the people failed to pray hard enough.

To the extent people accept charismatic claims, they have given up on reason as a means to deal with problems, and instead hope for deliverance through some sort of magical powers or divine grace, even though “pure charisma is specifically foreign to practical considerations” (Weber 1978, Vol. 2, p. 244). For Weber, charisma,



**Figure 1.6** Formation of Charismatic Authority and Identity

magic, divine grace, and the like simply do not exist as such, but instead all ideas and attributes, “whether religious, artistic, ethical, scientific, or whatever else” (p. 1116), derive from social origins, both psychological and structural.

Weber clearly argues for a socially based perspective that establishes charisma as a social process, as an ongoing relationship between the holder of charisma and the people. The specific characteristics that people perceive as signs of charisma, and also the social role of charisma, both depend entirely on the sociohistorical context. If charisma does not exist in reality and depends entirely on public acknowledgment, the recognition of charismatic power is always tentative. Weber (1978) defines charismatic authority thus:

The term charisma will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These as such are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a “leader.” (Vol. 1, p. 241)

The exact attributes that a person must possess who would claim leadership on this basis depends on the specific circumstances. For example, Weber (1978) writes that such a person “gains and retains it solely by proving his powers in practice. He must work miracles, if he wants to be a prophet. He must perform heroic deeds, if he wants to be a warlord” (Vol. 2, p. 1114). To be more exact, a person must do things that are perceived as charismatic, that is, perceived as supernatural or superhuman. However, despite any other achievements, one particular requirement overrides all others. Weber says that “most of all, his divine mission must prove itself by bringing well-being to his faithful followers; if they do not fare well, he obviously is not the god-sent master” (p. 1114). This latter aspect proves crucial for Napoleon, for example, because it is exactly what he promised for the people of France, but could never actually deliver. Despite certain gains, he led France to endless war and ultimate collapse. The same is true for Hitler, for Mussolini, for Idi Amin, for Pol Pot, for Juan Peron, and other national leaders. On a smaller scale, cult leaders like Charles Manson, Shoko Asahara, Marshall Applewhite, Jim Jones, David Koresh,

and others claimed divine being, and all led their followers into death. Some held a specifically religious position, and some held secular offices, but all claimed direct divine appointment from God or other supernatural power, such as Nature or Destiny.

Consequently, failure to provide well-being for the followers causes support for the charismatic claimant to fall away and likewise the status as leader. Clearly, Weber sees the public in a very active role; the people must acclaim the charismatic qualities within the claimant and in so doing project the status as leader. The masses continue to play an active role throughout the claimant's tenure as leader. Charisma only exists if and to the extent that people acknowledge it. In other words, leaders do not seize power; people hand it to them through submission. Charisma always comes from the people and is never a quality that the leader actually possesses, since gods and magic (for Weber) do not really exist. Although different people certainly have different abilities, and some people have highly unique ones, we are all only human.

If the public acknowledges the charismatic claim as valid, they must likewise bow down in subservience. Acknowledgment means deference regarding the issue of leadership and authority. For Weber (1978), the individual's charisma in no way actually flows from some supernatural source, but rather "what is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority" and most importantly that "it is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma" (Vol. 1, p. 242). If the followers or believers acknowledge the claim, "it is the duty of those subject to charismatic authority . . . to act accordingly" (p. 242). So long as the public recognition (acclaim) of the person as charismatic continues, this "mere fact of recognizing the personal mission of a charismatic master establishes his power" (Vol. 2, p. 1115). To acclaim charismatic endowment inherently means "the surrender of the faithful to the extraordinary and unheard-of" (p. 1115) to which all tradition and regulation is irrelevant, except that it must bring well-being to the followers. In any case, recognition and subservience inextricably occur simultaneously through an ongoing process of claim and acclaim.

### *Of Priests and Prophets—Establishment Versus Charisma*

Thus, Weber elaborates in *Ancient Judaism* about two essential forms of religion. One is the religion of the establishment, the religion of priests, who in some official capacity ensure that people observe the established tradition of the ruling religion, and that people do not stray from the official doctrine. The other form of religion is that of the prophets who, under the aegis of charismatic authority, deliver messages that overturn one or more aspects of the established religion. Weber explores this distinction empirically, using ancient Judaism as a historical example, although it is not limited to Judaism.

Ancient Judaism differs in many ways from Judaism today. In particular, a body of priests officiated over the religion in the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem. Highly educated, these priests also wielded considerable political power and served the interests of the King of Israel. Alongside the priests, an oracular, that is, a charismatic tradition of prophetic seers existed outside the purview of the priests. The

priests served God, known as Yahweh, or often written as YHWH because the exact vowels are unknown. The priests guarded God's secret rites and dominated all official discourse about God and scripture. Yet their political position and service to the king discredited their religious authority for much of the common population, who embraced instead the prophetic tradition in Judaism. We see examples of both in Judeo-Christian-Islamic scripture, also known as Abrahamic scripture. Of course, "the priests sought to monopolize the regular management of Yahwe worship and all related activities" (Weber [1919] 1967:168). As part of the established order, they would tolerate no dissention. Yet as we will see, the prophets were often beyond their physical and spiritual reach.

Jewish and other Semitic people (such as Arabs) migrated into the Middle East and Egypt particularly sometime before 1700 BCE, when a reliable historical record begins and by which time the Jews were well established. Prior to this time, the Jews were apparently a nomadic people. The Jews were also enslaved in Egypt as the Old Testament depicts, but why and for how long is still uncertain historically. In any case, Jewish kingdoms and city-states were established around 1200 BCE, and eventually these consolidated into one kingdom under David, the first King. Solomon succeeded his father as king around 965 BCE. His successor, Rehoboam, ruled badly, and in 926 BCE the kingdom divided into the Kingdom of Israel in the north and the Kingdom of Judea in the south, both located more or less, but also larger than, where we find modern Israel today.

The Jews subsequently fought many wars against many adversaries, losing most. The only significant building the Jews built was the Temple of Solomon around 940 BCE, which the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar II destroyed in 587 BCE. In 586, the Babylonians took many Jews as slaves, and many others fled to Egypt and Persia, in what is now called the First Great Diaspora. After the Persians defeated the Babylonians, the Persian King Cyrus the Great allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple, which they completed around 515 BCE. Two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, competed with two priests, Nehemiah and Ezra, for spiritual control of the new Jewish state. In Weber's view, they claimed legitimacy based on two entirely different traditions, one prophetic and revolutionary, the other priestly and based on social order.

Eventually, Alexander the Great defeated the Persians and granted the Jews greater political freedom, which thus vindicated the prophetic claim to authority that emphasized change and renewal. However, Alexander died in 323 BCE, and numerous states conquered and reconquered Israel over the next several decades. The Roman general Pompey (Gaius Pompeius Magnus) conquered Israel for Rome in 63 BCE. In 6 CE, the Emperor Augustus (Gaius Octavius Caesar Augustus) made Israel a province under a governor, known as a procurator, the title that Pontius Pilate held. The Jews rebelled in 66 CE, and the new Emperor Vespasian sent his son, Titus Vespasianus, to suppress it. He completed his task in 70 CE, which culminated with the destruction of the Temple of Solomon in 70 CE. Much of the population again dispersed throughout Europe and the Middle East in the Second Great Diaspora.

The destruction of the temple meant the demise of the priests, who never reestablished themselves, but it also meant the destruction of an independent prophetic tradition. After 70 CE, Judaism became rabbinical, that is, the rabbis



united the priestly and prophetic traditions that define Judaism today. The rabbis represent a harmony between forces of change and forces of order in that after 70 CE, the Jews required both in order to survive. As a pariah people, they could not afford internal division and strife. They would face considerable hostility and persecution wherever they sought solace. In their diasporic wanderings around Europe and the Middle East, the Jews required order to maintain the coherence of their communities, as well as a coherent means to manage the constant change that diaspora entails, as different communities of Jews formed in different lands amidst varying conditions and customs.

Weber examines such history (although this is a very brief synopsis) and draws conclusions about the basis of religious legitimacy, and this is one of Weber's contributions to sociology. The prophets, as charismatic figures, claimed authority directly from God, through spontaneous revelation. The prophet spoke "under the influence of spontaneous inspiration wherever and whenever this inspiration might strike. . . . [T]he predominant concern of the prophet was the destiny of the state and the people. This concern always assumed the form of emotional invectives against the overlords. It is here that the demagogue appeared for the first time in the records of history" (Weber [1919] 1967:269). With the history of the Jews in mind, they had a lot to be concerned about. It is the history of wars, enslavement, exile, and finally, total domination. The Jews would not reestablish a homeland until modern times in 1947. The nearly constant social turmoil produced a long history of prophets who spoke out against the various "overlords," both Jewish and non-Jewish.

At the same time, "the holders of power faced these powerful demagogues with fear, wrath, or indifference as the situation warranted" (Weber [1919] 1967:271). They might try to win them over, or just as often, outlaw and if necessary, execute them. Like Durkheim, Weber does not attempt to assess whether God actually speaks through priests or prophets, but instead seeks a sociological explanation. Weber argues that many prophets likely succeeded in their message because they accurately assessed the political situation of their day, and thus their advice to submit or rebel, as appropriate, proved the correct and beneficial course of action. Sometimes, though, prophetic advice proves disastrous. For example, in 66 CE, a group called the Essenes, a millennial and prophetic group that practiced a militant and austere version of Judaism, likely inspired the Jewish uprising against Rome, which led to ruin in 70 CE, as described above. Such outcomes usually explain why a movement disappears into history. It is not the content of the beliefs (austerity is a common prescription for problems) but rather, measurable success or failure.

Overall, the prophet thinks and acts independently, and usually speaks in terms of generalized rather than specific outcomes. Prophets focus mostly on moral issues, not concrete political or military strategy. Yet their moral focus does not pertain to specific rules or prohibitions, but rather, to the overall orientation an individual and community has to God. In other words, the decisive concern for the prophet was faith. This signified "the unconditional trust in Yahwe's omnipotence and the sincerity of his word and conviction in its fulfillment despite all external probabilities to the contrary" (Weber [1919] 1967:318). With this in mind, the rebellion of 66 CE becomes more intelligible. Historical accounts clearly show that the power of Rome

over the Jews was considerable, if not obviously indomitable—from a rational perspective. The priests of the temple did everything they could to prevent the uprising, including turning over agitators, especially prophets, to the Roman authorities. The priests likely saw Jesus as one such prophetic agitator. In any case, the Essenes prophetically called upon the Jews to wield religious faith against Roman swords. The outcome was never in doubt. For this reason, Weber sees the prophets, and charismatic leaders in general, as dangerous. Recall his earlier conceptualization that charisma attempts to reshape the world through inner transformation and conviction, not through rational analysis of external conditions.

The rise of rabbinical Judaism marks the end of the Jewish prophetic tradition, but prophesy transferred to the emerging religion of Christianity. Weber sees this as entirely predictable, given that no official Christian hierarchy existed for nearly 300 years. Christianity spread initially through voluntary individuals and friendship networks, such that each person became a self-proclaimed authority. Scripture records Paul as one who defined Christianity to a great extent, but in his own day, he was one of many. However, the prophetic tradition in Christianity, as we will see in later chapters, introduced a new element, the concept of the eternal evil adversary.

This creates one of the most problematic aspects of religion, love of the righteous and hatred of the wicked—both unrelenting and absolute. In turn, this often leads to hostility toward those people whom the leader identifies as evil, and this sometimes leads to individual persecution, mass persecution, and even genocide. Such became the preoccupation of sociologists during and after the World War II period.

## Middle Sociology: World War II and Its Aftermath

In 1941, German social psychologist Erich Fromm (1900–1980) published the first book he ever wrote in English, *Escape From Freedom*. He introduced the concept of *authoritarianism* to the English-speaking world, which eventually inspired hundreds of studies in many different contexts. Although this book and the concept of authoritarianism spoke initially to the rise of Hitler and totalitarianism generally, Fromm and many others would quickly and extensively apply the concept to religion. Authoritarianism means the desire to submit to anyone or anything perceived as stronger or superior, and simultaneously the desire to dominate anyone or anything perceived as weaker or inferior. Since this desire depends on feelings rather than actual assessment of strength and weakness, ability or incompetence, authoritarianism relates closely to Weber's concept of charisma, as explained above.

Applied to religion specifically, Fromm sees a conflict in the West, expressed through the Judeo-Christian tradition, as an ongoing battle between empowerment and capitulation. Through a series of books, namely, *Man for Himself* (1947), *The Sane Society* (1955), and *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* ([1973] 1994), Fromm argues that modern society substitutes efficiency process and object-desire for all other possible connections between people, and in the process, we regard each other as mere objects, devoid of humanity and spiritual significance. In so doing, we diminish our own lives to the point of becoming a thing, in

that we are each nothing more than a commodity that has value only so long as there is demand in the social marketplace. As a living commodity, we seek what makes any other commodity valuable—demand. Thus, people seek attention more than anything else, more than, for example, enlightenment or a record of accomplishment. Fromm ([1941] 1994) observes that “in the course of modern history the authority of the church has been replaced by that of the State, that of the State by that of conscience, and in our era, the latter has been replaced by the anonymous authority of common sense and public opinion” (p. 252). For those who do not acquire attention, three main outcomes become likely—narcissism, destructiveness, and necrophilia (see sidebar).

Likewise, religion becomes a product for consumption on Sunday, with little meaning elsewhere. It becomes no more than a means of gaining personal satisfaction. Religion thus becomes an irrelevant set of ideas in the form of beliefs, and an empty set of motions in the form of rituals. In *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966), Fromm argues that Judeo-Christian scripture teaches both empowerment, the progressive message, and domination and capitulation, the reactionary and authoritarian message. In a larger sense, he contends that this translates into genuine religion that, like Marx argues, empowers people to live genuinely meaningful lives and in the process, develop their own abilities and insight in cooperation with others. On the reactionary side, scripture legitimates the strong over the weak, severe punishment rather than forgiveness of sin, and the annihilation of evil—in whatever form—even if this means annihilating entire races or religions.

Research and theory thus continued in the area of authority and especially charismatic authority. Levi-Strauss (1971), Lowenthal and Guterman ([1949] 1970), Mazlish (1990), and Willner (1984) show that exaltation of the leader and demonization of the enemy occur through a specific and predictable social process. If the public withdraws support, the leader, or prophet, or warlord, or whatever falls from grace and loses divine status. The role of the agitator, or in other words the charismatic claimsmaker, is crucial as a focal point for a submissive public to project its emotional longings. Charisma is exaltation of the in-group, a type of mythological conception of the leader, who is the supreme representative of the in-group. It is also the damnation of the out-group, the mythological conception of the people who are the eternal enemy of the in-group.

Franz Neumann ([1944] 1966) in the detailed and sophisticated *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism*, sought to understand how one of the

### Erich Fromm: Outcomes of Modern Isolation

**Narcissism**—Contrary to popular usage, this is not self-love and a secure sense of self, but rather self-loathing and intense insecurity. It develops in a person who has no accomplishments, no knowledge, and no love to give. Rather than learn and achieve, the narcissist demands attention and acclaim anyway, simply for existing.

**Sadistic Destructiveness**—Sometimes insecurity of the self generates aggression, a desire to destroy, either literally or symbolically, anyone who enjoys life or anything that represents joy or fulfillment. This is more than jealousy, but an intense hatred of one's own self and one's own life. This person seeks to dominate, and the ability to destroy is the ultimate expression of control.

**Necrophilia**—Not simply a love of death, this type of person hates anything alive, anything that signifies passion and humanity. More than a love of corpses, the necrophiliac loves anything cold and mechanical, such as inanimate objects over people, or procedure over purpose.

most socially and technologically advanced countries in the world (Germany) could embrace a reactionary and superstitious force like Nazism. To understand this cataclysmic historical turn, scholars such as Massing (1949) in *Rehearsal for Destruction* and Horkheimer ([1936] 1995) in "Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era," studied cultural history, discovering that the foundations of Nazism developed over time, and did not just suddenly appear during a period of hardship.

Certainly, political-economic factors shape the type and availability of life opportunities (or lack thereof) and determine the type and presence of social controls, yet only people can have thoughts, hold values, practice religion, love, hate, or decide to follow orders or not. This is a fundamental principle in sociology, that for example, "Nazism is a psychological problem, but the psychological problems themselves have to be understood as being molded by socioeconomic factors; Nazism is an economic and political problem, but the hold it has over a whole people has to be understood on psychological grounds" (Fromm [1941] 1994:206). Thus, any explanation of human attitudes and actual behavior must focus on how people interpret, react to, and behave according to structural influences.

In this regard, several detailed empirical studies soon followed, including one Fromm conducted in 1936, but which was not published in any language until 1984 (in English translation), which surveyed and interviewed social and political attitudes in Weimar Germany, and the period of 1929–1947 includes at least 15 lesser studies (Stone, Lederer, and Christie, 1993). Following Fromm's initial theory, Lowenthal and Guterman ([1949] 1970) found that ideological themes "directly reflect the audience's predispositions" (p. 5). The agitator does not manipulate the audience from the outside, in the sense of brainwashing them, but rather appeals to psychological attitudes that are already present. Extremist ideology provides a framework that shapes preexisting but inchoate feelings and gives them a fixed and certain foundation.

Extremist ideology in the authoritarian form supplies a sense of certainty not by identifying specific grievances and problems, but rather by "destroying all rational guideposts," which leaves "on one end the subjective feeling of dissatisfaction and on the other the personal enemy held responsible for it" (Lowenthal and Guterman [1949] 1970:6–7). This simplistic worldview creates a hierarchy in which the insecure person finds solace through order—a higher power or purpose to which one submits, and an enemy to dominate and persecute. Although seemingly unrelated on the surface, hatred of the poor, often expressed as consternation against welfare recipients, and the consistently high prevalence of rape and other expressions of misogyny pervade contemporary politics and culture. If one looks even slightly below the surface, however, the actual similarity among racism, misogyny, nationalism, radical identity movements, and hate crimes, not to mention the still more virulent forms of hatred—persecutions and genocide—becomes clear. They all share a belief in some great Enemy of supernatural proportions that is everywhere yet nowhere. It is the cause of our problems and permeates everything contrary to whatever "we" believe in, yet remains so diabolically surreptitious it eludes all attempts to peacefully, and rationally, remove it.

In the late 1940s, researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, conducted over 1,000 interviews and collected vast amounts of quantitative data to study the issue of authority in a democratic society, namely, in the United States. Religion was a key variable. Theodor Adorno, a contemporary of Erich Fromm, developed the theoretical conclusions for these studies, known as the Berkeley Studies, and published them in 1950 in a book called *The Authoritarian Personality*. The theory has several variables, which the team argues apply to many forms of human social interaction, including religion.

This study inspired an entire generation of social psychologists, who tested for authoritarianism in nearly every conceivable social context—in churches, at work, in schools, on sports teams, in fraternities and sororities, in the family, and in many other contexts. From 1950 to 1974 alone, the study of authoritarianism generated over 750 separate studies. Both the theoretical and methodological innovations (in terms of quantitative data collection, use of Likert-type measures, and regression analysis) greatly expanded the prominence and influence of sociology throughout the 1950s–1970s.

### The Landmark Berkeley Findings 1–3

#### Essential Authoritarian Character

*Conventionalism* means a rigid adherence to what the person perceives as conventional values; whether such values actually predominate in society, and thus constitute the typical or mainstream values, is not really the issue. Rather, “adherence to conventional values is determined by contemporary external social pressure. . . . [I]t is based upon the individual’s adherence to the standards of the collective powers with which he, for the time being, is identified” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:159). The person identifies with and thereby submits to powers they deem superior and proper, rather than “a mere acceptance of conventional values” (p. 159).

*Authoritarian submission* is the “desire for a strong leader” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:160). Authoritarian submission to a leader occurs not as a rational evaluation of the leader’s goals and likely ability to accomplish them, but as “an exaggerated, all-out, emotional need to submit” (p. 160). The authoritarian personality submits only to what he or she feels is superior and more powerful.

*Authoritarian aggression* results from a displacement of resentment and frustration, which the condition of submission produces. Authoritarian submission creates an inherent contradiction in the individual’s personality, and thus “the authoritarian *must*, out of an inner necessity, turn his aggression against outgroups” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:162). Because the person cannot challenge the authority to which he or she submits, the individual can only vent frustration and aggression against a constructed, stereotyped out-group, which is itself a negative counterpart and immoral abomination that threatens to contaminate the sanctity of one’s own pure and sacred in-group (Levinson [1950] 1982:98–100). In order to lessen the anxiety and tension that submission to the in-group leader creates, the authoritarian is driven by psychological contradictions and compulsions “to see immoral attributes [in the out-group], whether this has a basis in fact or not” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:162).

Recent research from Altemeyer (1997) and Hunsberger (1995) confirms the relationship between commitment to fundamentalist religious ideals and intolerance and aggression. In a different study, Hunsberger (1996) found that fundamentalism determines authoritarian submission and aggression among Jews, Hindus, and Moslems as well as among Christians. Stone et al. (1993) applied the concepts anew to contemporary cases, and discovered that authoritarianism ebbs and flows depending on broader social conditions. Meloen (1999) studied authoritarianism through global comparative studies, and found it strongest in countries undergoing rapid social change, whether the change is generally for better or for worse. If society changes suddenly, even positive change can increase authoritarian tendencies if change disconnects people from sources of meaning, especially religion. We will return to the theory of authoritarianism in later chapters.

### Berkeley Findings 4–6

#### Typical Additional Character Elements

*Anti-intracception* is a fear of sensitive, introspective, gentle emotions. This individual fears sensitive emotions because it might lead him or her “to think the wrong thoughts, or realize pangs of guilt, unrequited feelings, emotional emptiness, and so on” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:164). The most important effect is “a devaluation of the human and an overvaluation of the physical object. . . . [H]uman beings are looked upon as if they were physical objects to be coldly manipulated—even while physical objects, now vested with emotional appeal, are treated with loving care” (p. 164). Inanimate objects are emotionally safe because they possess only the feelings projected onto them.

*Superstition and stereotypy* become the means by which a person replaces his or her own feelings with fixed external impositions. Superstition, or the belief in “mystical or fantastic external determinants of the individual fate, and stereotypy, the disposition to think in rigid categories” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:165), are both systems of belief that stand above and beyond the individual’s ability to fully understand, question, or change. Both superstition and stereotypy “indicate a tendency to shift responsibility from within the individual onto outside forces beyond one’s control,” and most importantly this shift occurs in “a nonrealistic way by making the individual fate dependent on fantastic factors” (p. 165). Thus, the individual bears no responsibility for his or her actions. Superstition and stereotypy depend on irrational and subconscious insecurities rather than a shrewd analysis of actual social conditions.

*Power and toughness* is the tendency to view all human relations as power relations in dichotomous categories with an underlying power dimension: good–bad, strong–weak, leader–follower, superior–inferior, and so on. The obsession with power and toughness “contains elements that are essentially contradictory. . . . One solution which such an individual often achieves is that of alignment with power-figures, an arrangement by which he is able to gratify both his need for power and his need to submit” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:166–167). This type of person typically seeks reassurance by joining anonymously with some general movement and ideology that emphasizes in-group superiority based on simple and crude factors, such as race or language, which also allows the authoritarian to condemn others who do not belong.

Yet the research that the Berkeley Studies prompted for the most part emphasized the psychological side of the social-psychological equation. Studies that originated at other institutions and that dealt with a different issue—race and racism—extended a critical approach to U.S. society and to religion. Race and religion together have shaped many of the historically transformative movements in the United States.

### Berkeley Findings 7–9

#### Typical Additional Elements

*Destructiveness and cynicism* express undifferentiated hostility that results when the individual has “numerous externally imposed restrictions upon the satisfaction of his needs” and who thus harbors “strong underlying aggressive impulses” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:168). The authoritarian translates abstract social forces into personified out-groups. Almost any group may become the enemy, whether Jews, blacks, gays, feminists, liberals, welfare cheats, communists, and nonbelievers of many types, any and all of which constitute the evil, immoral, or viciously corrupt foundations of all our problems, and thus in the eyes of authoritarians, these people, these evil and perverse creatures, must be eliminated.

*Projectivity* is the means by which the authoritarian creates the mythical enemy and endows them with all the negative, unholy, and abominable characteristics that purportedly make up their essence. “The suppressed impulses of the authoritarian character tend to be projected onto other people who are then blamed out of hand” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:169) for all the problems of society.

Sex measures suspicion and hostility regarding sexual activity, and furthermore the belief in such phenomena as “wild erotic excesses, plots and conspiracies, and danger from natural catastrophes” (Adorno et al. [1950] 1982:169) as indicators that the world is full of dangerous and unfathomable passions beyond human perception or control. This justifies constant suspicion and the compulsion to seek out, condemn, and destroy evil in all its guises. A person becomes preoccupied with sexual perversity because of “a general tendency to distort reality through projection, but sexual content would hardly be projected unless the subject had impulses of this same kind that were unconscious and strongly active” (p. 170). In other words, projection often takes a specifically sexual form because of one’s own repressed sexual desires and the frustration they create.

## Race: The Great Religious Divider in the United States

Sunday church services are the most racially segregated institutions in the United States, more than neighborhoods, work, education, or any other aspect of American life. Of course, this is not incidental, but developed consistently and congruently with racism throughout the history of the United States. As we will see in the next chapter, race and religion configured many of the contemporary issues of civil rights and justice in the United States. In terms of race relations, religion has worked both progressively and oppressively, in more or less equal measure.

On the oppressive side, the racial segregation of American churches began around 1830, by which time significant numbers of black people, some free but mostly slave, had converted to Christianity. Yet segregation was not initially so absolute. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, black people attended the same churches as whites, but occupied separate pews (Emerson and Smith 2000). Segregation by church took place over time, but mostly occurred after the Civil War and continued well into the 20th century, and despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964, remains mostly in place today. Sociologically, churches like neighborhoods remain racially segregated because of social networks, demographic differences, and personal and institutional racism. Overall, people worship where they live and socialize with their local cohorts. Racialization in religion reflects the racialization of all aspects of social life in the United States, including work, housing, consumer patterns, and culture (Emerson and Smith 2000).

Although racist beliefs partly result from a lack of knowledge and experience, racism results much more from a complex interaction of social and psychological factors. Regarding political economy and social culture, that is, regarding structural factors in society, much research indicates that modern capitalism has underdeveloped black communities in particular (Gans 1996; W. J. Wilson 1997) and disenfranchised blacks from the mainstream economy (Bates 1997; Marable 1999). This disenfranchisement overlaps race and class, and not only disadvantages blacks, but positions them as a “an industrial reserve army,” available to serve as scab labor or more generally as a labor pool available to work for even lower wages and benefits than their tentatively employed white counterparts (Kasarda 1990; Marable 1999). As a series of recent studies finds, however, the United States increasingly “warehouses” the nation’s poor in prisons (Herivel and Wright 2003). As the studies show, mass incarceration of ethnic minority and poor populations has broken poor families as much as economic uncertainty, and has fractured religious communities among the poor as well, given that large segments of the current generation are in prison. As William Julius Wilson (1997) finds, public policy often actively maintains an economically desperate ethnic underclass, and as Massey and Denton (1998) find, urban renewal rarely benefits the urban poor. Instead, it pushes them aside to make room for upper-income real estate and businesses.

Thus, the sometimes-held notion that blacks are a threat to employed whites is to some extent genuine, although this conflict is the result of structural class relations within capitalism, and not something that blacks would willingly assume. Quite the contrary; in fact, lower-class blacks typically espouse mainstream values—hard work and education (Kelley 1996), both of which express strong belief in the current economic system, and that people should not expect special privileges. If anything, white workers have become far more cynical about the value of dedicated, honest work than blacks and other minorities (Roediger 1999). The point is that race often becomes a matter of conflict because of its associated overlap with class and economic survival. Therefore, simply telling people that racism is an ignorant attitude and that race has no relevance is, however unintentionally, also saying that class and economic concerns do not matter in life. The concerns about race overlay very real material interests that people cannot simply forget.

Beginning with Adorno et al. ([1950] 1982) in social science, and Sartre ([1948] 1995) in philosophy, numerous scholars have pointed to the notion of the racial



out-group or the demonized racial Other as fundamental to authoritarian racism and ethnocentrism. Many scholars have rediscovered this approach, such as Langmuir (1990a, 1990b) with the concept of chimera, and Noël ([1989] 1994), who characterizes the oppressed as a “stigmatized abstraction” (pp. 109–110). Dinnerstein (1994) shows how important such abstractions are for maintaining an overall social climate of racial suspicion and sometimes hostility. Regarding the overall social climate, in which authoritarian racism can take various forms, Forbes (1985) finds strong correlation between ethnocentrism and nationalism, in which general authoritarian attitudes serve as a foundation.

Early contributions include Bettelheim and Janowitz (1950), who examine two predominant expressions of racism in the United States, namely anti-Semitic and antiblack racism. They find that, in general, racism exists as external social pressures, but crucially, this requires a framework of internalized values that predispose the individual to accept certain ideas or course of action, and to reject others. However, and this is decisive, the tendency to perceive the world in dualistic terms typifies the authoritarian disposition toward many issues, and thus people who believe in racist stereotypes often uncritically accept other dualistic oppositions, such as good versus bad, honest versus dishonest, or strong versus weak, with little room for anything in between.

People who hold racist and other intolerant attitudes are not ignorant, in the sense of being uninformed individuals. Indeed, Aho (1990) shows that racist-right extremists in Idaho are above average in formal educational level attained. They are in fact thoroughly integrated into the dominant values of society. At the same time, and this is crucial, their basic orientation predisposes them to attitudes that deliver high levels of emotional satisfaction through absolutist views, often coupled with behavior directed as a sort of moral crusade.

Lower-class blacks and whites face many of the same structural inequalities and systematic exploitation as cheap and transient labor forces. As capitalism and nationalism developed in the United States, racism developed as a means to “withdraw the dominant group’s sympathy from an ‘inferior race,’ to facilitate its exploitation,” initially through slavery and sharecropping, and presently as “a surplus labor pool” such that “a permanent underclass of blacks is created” (Marable [1984] 2007:72–73). In fact, history shows that wealthy whites consciously excluded blacks from the best wage opportunities immediately after the Civil War, so that impoverished whites would not need to compete with, nor join with, impoverished blacks (Fredrickson 1983:209). This policy was quite effective, such that by the turn of the century, Northern labor unions sometimes attempted to rally white workers against the supposed threat of “mechanical Negro labor” as an aspect of class consciousness in the overall struggle against capitalist oppression (Fredrickson 1983:222–223). As the historical data in Allen (1994), Fredrickson (2002), and Vaughan (1995) shows, racism systematically excludes blacks from a central role in the modern economy, and simultaneously becomes an aspect of white culture that provides economically insecure whites with an emotional pacifier and a feeling of superiority over blacks, coupled with a supposed solidarity with more prosperous whites. Hence the influence of a political economy begins to shape emotional attitudes.

The importance of feeling in the face of unfavorable material conditions leads to important questions: What if factual knowledge, in this case regarding race, means little or nothing to a person? How is it that some people prefer a prejudiced, or in general a superstitious view of the world over and against verifiable fact or even personal experience? What if a person responds overwhelmingly to emotionally potent belief or ideology, rather than rational analysis? This suggests that various attitudes of domination, such as authoritarianism, racism, ethnocentrism, and sexism, are related. As we will see throughout the book, religion can either amplify or mollify these sentiments.

Wieviorka (1995) captures the central point about authoritarianism and its racist manifestation. That is, he argues that racism in Western culture depends on perception, which develops from material encounters and interests. In other words, “racism was formed, even before it received its present name, out of the encounter with the Other—most often a dominated Other” (p. 5), which acquired a status opposite that of the ruling race. Just as the ruling and superior race embodies everything good, wholesome, proper, strong, perseverant, and so on, the Other embodies everything evil, vile, foul, weak, corrupt, lazy, and so forth. In the same way that many feminists beginning with Simone de Beauvoir discuss women as the Second Sex, as the Other, in the way they have been historically treated, so racism similarly positions the racial Other as the out-group, forever different from and inferior to the in-group. These views did not suddenly appear, nor result from the work of individual agitators, but developed over time in conjunction with political-economic conditions. Eventually, the myth becomes deeply rooted, almost as an automatic impulse or a belief about the essential “truth” of our times.

It is important to remember that such discrimination is not always conscious, nor is it always institutional. As Essed’s (1990) interview data shows, racism may be passive (apathetic inaction, and thus support) confirmation of dominant values, or individual, whereby particular business managers, for example, hold racist attitudes and practice discriminatory hiring, while others in the same business do not. Nevertheless, Essed concludes that whatever the form, the underlying principle remains constant, that racism occurs to the extent individuals internalize dominant values—whether norms, interests, customs, religion, or other values (p. 32)—exalt the in-group, and demonize the out-group. Later research (Essed and Goldberg 2001) confirms that the systematic demonization of blackness continues. This includes not only black people, but a person of any color perceived to have “black” attributes or behave as a black sympathizer.

Whatever group becomes the demonized Other, religion often encodes in terms of an evil Other, an evil enemy. This evil enemy designation may be placed on a real group or an imaginary group, but either way, the enemy acquires an unreal and impossible stigma—they become an evil with allegedly supernatural powers.

### The Evil Enemy

Given the holocaust in Europe, in which Nazi Germany murdered about 6 million Jews and 6 million others, the issue of the great Enemy, the great Satan, and similar beliefs occupied much of the study of religion in the post–World War II period, and

arguably, remain highly relevant today. Maurice Samuel in *The Great Hatred* ([1940] 1988) sees absolute hate as the mirror of absolute love. In this sense, absolute love can only apply to those who are exactly like ourselves, and those who directly threaten this ideal of perfection can be nothing other than the great Evil. Just as the believer must absolutely support and submit to the great Love, they must simultaneously attack and destroy the great Evil.

Jean Paul Sartre in *Anti-Semite and Jew* ([1948] 1995) conceptualizes the Enemy, in this case the Jew, as a mythical creation, such that “if the Jew did not exist, the anti-Semite would invent him.” As contemporary social historian Gavin Langmuir (1990a, 1990b) elaborates at length, the evil Enemy is a chimera, a mythical creature that consists of a goat, snake, and lion. Separately, these are all real animals, but when combined into a single beast, it is mythical and impossible. Such is the nature of the great evil Enemy, which is fiendishly clever but also ignorant and inferior, rich yet dependent on welfare, everywhere yet nowhere specifically.

Even though national anti-Semitism has somewhat waned, it is “not, of course, that any magic spell suddenly stopped people from hating the Jews. But the ill will remains in an unfocused state” (Finkelkraut [1980] 1997:147) so that other groups may, if structural factors develop appropriately, occupy pariah status. Indeed, the current president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmedinejad, often rails against Israel and the Jews as a Great Evil that must be eradicated. Agitators can also foment belief in imaginary enemies, and even lead a sort of crusade. However, neither structural turmoil alone nor the cajoling of singular individuals produces authoritarian racism unless it provokes an emotional response in members of the population, and specifically, feelings of fear that arise from insecurity. Emotionalism is inherently unstable, and therefore unreliable as a political force, but so long as structural inequality, prejudice, oppression, violence, and lack of economic opportunities persists, authoritarian tendencies will persist, often just below the surface. Thus,

racist ideology couldn't keep its hands off the wreckage of Nazism. Universally rejected in public, it now shows its face only in private, with a violence that's frightening nonetheless. We've become used to this dichotomy: while politicians speak the language of justice and equality, it's left to individuals to express their brutal antipathies or racial prejudice. (Finkelkraut 1997:148)

So although open racism may not play to political advantage, racism still exists as long as material and emotional insecurity exist, so that at times politicians can use code words such as “welfare mothers” for inner-city black women, which plays on unspoken racial prejudice. The racism of which Finkelkraut speaks appeared as a response to the flooding of New Orleans in 2005 from Hurricane Katrina—the belief that the predominantly black population simply reaped the outcome of their own lazy and immoral lifestyle. For example, commentators such as Hal Lindsey and Charles Colson (2005, “Religious Conservatives Claim Katrina Was God's

The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived, and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.

—John F. Kennedy

Mass movements can rise and spread without a belief in God, but never without belief in a devil.

—Eric Hoffer, 1951

Omen”) attributed the destruction to the wrath of God, as a warning that cataclysm in other cities would be coming if we don’t remove the moral rot from our midst. Why New Orleans first? Finkelkraut would say that, since New Orleans was 80% black, the derogatory remarks about the city and its people carry an implied racist element (they are expendable), not an explicit element. But overt racism is not necessary if such sentiment is already widespread.

Such attitudes waver in and out of public discourse, and gain greater acceptance as social problems increase, especially in the absence of substantive public discourse and open exchange of information (Chomsky 1989, 1991; Parenti 1994). Not everyone believes the Big Lie all at once, totally, and for all time.

Research shows that attitudes among whites toward blacks, for example, are often ambivalent, or more accurately, passively racist. In practice, the majority of whites in the United States favor the idea of racial equality, but simultaneously oppose concrete practices, such as blacks moving into their neighborhood, or interracial marriage. Kovel ([1970] 1984) thus specifies a distinction between “aversive” racism, and “dominative” racism. The aversive racist is the classic liberal, or in other words someone who is 10 degrees left of center in good times, and 10 degrees right of center if the issue effects the individual personally. Expressed in a more technical way, aversive racists may overreact and amplify their positive behavior in ways that would reaffirm their egalitarian convictions and their apparently nonracist attitudes, but as social and personal insecurity increases, the underlying negative portions of their attitudes are expressed with varying degrees of force, but always in a rationalized way. The aversive racist retains passively a belief in imaginary characteristics about the out-group, and regards these beliefs as fundamental and inviolate principles, however much the person may consciously sympathize with the plight of the out-group.

As social conditions change, the path from sympathy to blame and hatred often proves quite short. The passive racist, who feels smug with a sense of superior contempt for lesser people, is transformed by the right conditions into a fearful, insecure, and active racist who views the racial enemy with “fear, convulsive horror . . . and vast delusions of persecution.” What was initially a “conviction of superiority” transforms into “a cringing inferiority complex and a haunting, unremitting fear” (Samuel [1940] 1988:17) such that hatred acquires a new appeal and virulence as feelings of insecurity and vulnerability increase.

Although real people bear the brunt of mythical hatred, it is not real Jews, for example, that the anti-Semite hates, but the mythical image or “chimera” of Jewishness (Langmuir 1990a, 1990b). It is not the real welfare recipient—the harmless mother who receives governmental support for an average of 16 months—but the fictitious, vile, and foul creature that refuses to work, and supposedly prefers to parasitically live off the hard work of others while reproducing future generations of lazy, and oftentimes criminal, miscreants.

As Lowenthal and Guterman ([1949] 1970) note in *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator*, extremist ideology does not build an objective argument, but rather concentrates the follower’s dissatisfaction “through a fantastic and extraordinary image, which is an enlargement of the audience’s own projections” (p. 9). Extremism provides an image upon which the audience can

focus its hate and negative energy. Although the agitator may often use extravagant and even wildly fantastic imagery, the causal relationships between the enemy and one's own problems are always "facile, simple, and final, like daydreams" (p. 9). The appeal thus lies not in factual analysis of grievances, but rather in satisfying emotional longings for a sense of certainty, and being an outlet for the emotions of frustration.

Lowenthal and Guterman ([1949] 1970) contend that extremist visions appeal primarily to the "malaise which pervades all modern life" that "is a consequence of the depersonalization and permanent insecurity of modern life" (pp. 16–17). Since malaise results from deeply seated psychological dissatisfaction, unfulfilled emotions, and a fundamental lack of self-esteem, ideological extremism can shift focus from one issue to another, with no particular logical connection except the underlying enemy and the evil it imposes. Complex theories about economic change, for example, whereby social forces are beyond the control of any one person, do not seem as real or as the immediate emotional reactions of those who feels trapped perpetually by social forces they do not understand. Thus, extremist themes appeal to such a person because they relate real-life conditions to abstract and independent forces, "which exist prior to the articulation of any particular issue . . . and continue to exist after it" (Lowenthal and Guterman, p.16). Thus, once again the overall vision and the implied causal relations between one's problems in life and the eternal enemy are far more important than the face value of particular grievances. On the surface, extremist ideology appears to be the ravings of an irrational or vicious malcontent on the rampage about anything and everything. However, at the psychological level, extremist rhetoric is "consistent, meaningful, and significantly related to the social world" (Lowenthal and Guterman, p. 140) in the minds of the followers. Extremist ideology speaks a kind of code language that the authoritarian understands as clear, direct, and satisfying.

## Women as Other

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Simone de Beauvoir originated the concept of the Other, which corresponds to similar concepts mentioned earlier, such as "chimera" and the "out-group." At the same time as the Other constitutes opposition, it also "is necessary to the Good" (de Beauvoir [1952] 1989:143) because without its opposite, the Good (the in-group) has no basis for comparison. Yet the Other lacks its own creative ability, and thus at certain times in history becomes a demon in our midst, which we must annihilate. When the hatred of the Other applies to women in particular, we may call it misogyny.

As de Beauvoir ([1952] 1989) also argues, "woman is not the only Other" (p. 143) in history, nor even in any given society, but the particular out-group depends on the dominant culture's values that focus emotional reaction on a given group at a particular time and place. For example, Sanday (1990) finds in her study of fraternities that women constitute the status of object when present physically, and constitute an abstract Other in a fraternity culture that represents an idealized external threat to group identity and cohesion. As Sanday argues, the impact of this is very real, because for the brothers it transforms rape from an act of violence to an act of male bonding in which the woman serves only as a vehicle for heterosexual men to emotionally

bond with each other. In a broader study, Sanday (1997) finds that the general public, women as well as men, see women's bodies as objects, such that the woman herself is expected to relinquish control upon demand, especially for sex and childbearing.

This particular act of male bonding through rape and the general objectification of women signify a relation of superiority and inferiority, which is itself the product of but also a predisposition of misogynist attitudes in general. Sanday (1990) argues that fraternal identity typically revolves around highly idealized male virtues of control, power, and aggression, with a corresponding and equally essential negatively idealized notion of femininity (and women), which embody all the undesirable qualities the fraternity supposedly extrudes from itself.

For much of human history, women have played a secondary and often a submissive role in religion. In some cases, they are viewed as inherently inferior, even evil. However, we should not conclude that women are entirely subordinate in religion, past or present. On the contrary, as we will see in the next chapter, women have been quite important in religious history, and as will be clear in Chapter 7 about neopaganism and neofundamentalism, women are quite active in examples of two very different religions.

All of the aforementioned forms of the Other—whether based on race, gender, or religion—find renewed expression in some religious movements. As we will see in later chapters, the notion of an evil enemy configures various belief systems and often becomes the center of debate both within and between religions. We should seriously consider if Eric Hoffer is correct, that religion can exist without a belief in a god, but never without belief in the devil.

## Religion After World War II

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Not summer's bloom lies ahead of us, but a polar night of icy darkness and hardness. . . . When this night shall have slowly receded, who of those among us for whom Spring has finally returned will still be alive? And what will have become of all of you by then? Will you be bitter and banalistic? Will you simply and dully accept whatever form of domination claims authority over you? Or will the third and by no means the least likely possibility be your lot: mystic flight from reality. . . . In every one of these cases, I shall draw the conclusion that they have not measured up to their own doings. They have not measured up to the world as it really is in its everyday routine. (Weber [1918] 1958:128)

Max Weber made this chilling prediction shortly after the end of World War I, and he did not live to see the rise of Hitler and the destruction of World War II. Yet Weber seems especially prescient, in that modern society has lost its traditions, especially its religion, and replaced it only with the vacancy of material accumulation. But Weber by no means stands alone. Sociologists such as Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Walter Benjamin on the left, Thorsten Veblen in the middle, and Oswald Spengler on the right all argue that modern religion had become a façade that means nothing by itself, and most importantly, conceals the fact that it means nothing. Religion had not disappeared, but it had

changed form. As the standard of living rose dramatically after World War II, economics alone could no longer explain dissatisfaction. Sociology turned to culture, and religion again became a primary focus.

The classical theorists—Weber, Marx, and Durkheim (as well as others)—informed a new generation of sociology, which coalesced around two theoretical frameworks, functionalism and critical theory. Although usually utilized by competing political interests, as theories they are not as incompatible as many sociologists sometimes conventionally regard them. If we separate theory from political agenda, they share certain attributes in common. For the sake of clarity, I will focus on so-called critical perspectives here, and functionalism will be covered in Chapter 4. The reader should keep in mind, however, that the names and many prior associations regarding these names are often misleading. A critical perspective, which means to question conventional and superficial understanding, may or may not be found in any theoretical perspective; Marxism can be just as dogmatic as functionalism, and functionalism, as we will see in Chapter 4, can be critical as well. For now, let's return to the unfolding of theory as applied to religion.

Using sociology, critics of both left and right political orientation challenged the triumph of modernity and the process of rationalization. On the right, Oswald Spengler argued in his sophisticated *Decline of the West* ([1918] 1991) that Western civilization had lost the emotional power, and therefore the meaning, of its religious fervor. Spengler argued that modern rationalization had stripped religion of its intensity, and thus it now lacked the power to define cultural and racial identity, in which people find the meaning of life. For Spengler, meaning derives from blood and soil, an argument Nazi party philosopher Alfred Rosenberg promulgated. In the center, Thorsten Veblen earlier put forth a theory in *The Leisure Class* ([1899] 1994), which John Kenneth Galbraith later extended in *The Affluent Society* ([1958] 1998), that predicted religion would fade away in favor of bland, meaningless leisure.

As we know today, commercials, pageants, MTV videos, movies, and our culture in general remind us that superficial physical qualities are most important, and are defined within very narrow parameters of body size, dress, even attitude and topics of discussion. Romance becomes a means to acquire an object, and “the difference between people is reduced to a merely quantitative difference of being more or less successful, attractive, and hence valuable” (Fromm [1947] 1990:73). Self-esteem becomes dependent on whether a person can sell himself or herself in the market. The familiar term that bars are often “meat markets” illustrates the point. Overall, the marketing character strives to become what it thinks others want it to be; it defers its own goals, interest, and desires, both in career and personal relationships, to what will sell.

Galbraith and Veblen may reach similar conclusions, but their reasons are different. For Veblen, religion loses out to a type of corruption, in that people become fascinated with the easy life, a leisurely life, which has no particular highs or lows, and thus no need for great thought, emotion, or struggle, and therefore little need for religion. Galbraith agrees, except he feels that greater, more pressing problems will occupy our time, problems such as greater and greater wealth inequality, pollution, poverty, crime, and various other social problems that we face today. People will thus focus on the practical issues of the day, rather than the abstract affairs of religion, which he predicts will appear increasingly abstract and distant compared to real-life social problems. We can see today that neither perspective is accurate. Religion has

endured, in its traditional forms, in innovative new forms, and in forms that, at least on the surface, do not appear religious. We will address these forms in later chapters.

In the World War II period and its aftermath, most social scientists agreed, whether on the left or the right, that religion as it had existed in history was on the way out. It would prove increasingly irrelevant to modern life, fade away in the face of ease and moral corruption, or fracture into innumerable and ultimately personal variations. Daniel Bell in the *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* ([1976] 1996) argues the latter, and recent empirical studies support this view. Following the classical theorists, Bell argues that

the force of religion does not derive from any utilitarian quality (of self-interest or individual need); religion is not a social contract. . . . The power of religion derives from the fact that . . . it was the means of gathering together, in one overpowering vessel, the sense of the sacred—that which is set apart as the collective conscience of the people. (p. 154)

From a sociological perspective, religion serves to justify the social relations that constitute people's lives, and thus "to say then that 'God is dead' is, in effect, to say that the social bonds have snapped and that society is dead" (Bell, [1976] 1996: 155). All the theorists of the last 150 years we have examined, despite certain differences in intellectual and political orientation, agree that society depends on religion to legitimate the social order, and thereby to endow life, and death, with meaning.

As the famous sociologist Robert Merton (1910–2003) observes, religion has historically reinforced the existing society and at certain crucial times motivated people to radically challenge the existing society. Sociologists must therefore acknowledge that "systems of religion *do* affect behavior, that they are not merely epiphenomena but partially independent determinants of behavior" (Merton [1949] 1967:44). In other words, religion exists as an institution that endures independently of any given moment, and which exerts its own agenda (like all institutions). As Merton continues, "it makes a difference if people do or do not accept a particular religion" (p. 44), just as it makes a difference if people do or do not kill each other. In religion as in anything else, extremism tends to arise from the uncertainty of social disorder, when as Bell says social relations have snapped.

It would be a serious misunderstanding to conclude that religious extremism occurs only in so-called primitive or backward areas of the world, or perhaps only among small cultic groups, or in countries suffering from the most massive social change, such as Germany between the wars, or Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the Middle East today. Although significant social change typically prefigures the rise of extremism, the desire to submit and dominate, to relinquish rational thought and embrace charismatic fantasy, can occur at an everyday level, woven into the everyday practices of living. Similarly, a sort of everyday tendency toward irrationalism can become manifest if the right catalyst appears to focus emotional longings in some coherent way. The outcome need not be devastating, nor involve mass and brutal persecutions.



As an example, Willner (1984) records that an Indonesian worker believed that the Indonesian language was the most widely spoken language in the world after English:

Probing disclosed that the basis for his belief was someone's assurance that Sukarno [the Indonesian leader] had said this in one of his speeches. If Sukarno had said it, he stubbornly repeated, it must be true. It became clear that the only way we could have shaken his conviction would have been to persuade him that Sukarno had not made such a statement. (pp. 25–26)

Similarly, people generally trusted Ronald Reagan as president of the United States (1980–1988), who retained *personal* approval and therefore legitimacy as leader, despite very low *job* approval. As Reagan's job performance rating plummeted to only 35% approval in January 1983 (which corresponded to double-digit unemployment), his personal approval rating remained in the 60%–70% range (Heertsgaard 1988:152). Thus, if Reagan or his appointed representatives announced that steps were being taken to solve America's problems, the problems must lie elsewhere, somewhere separate from Reagan himself. Although he was president, he was not of the political ilk, but a crusader who, in times of need, steps forward to wield the sword of righteousness.

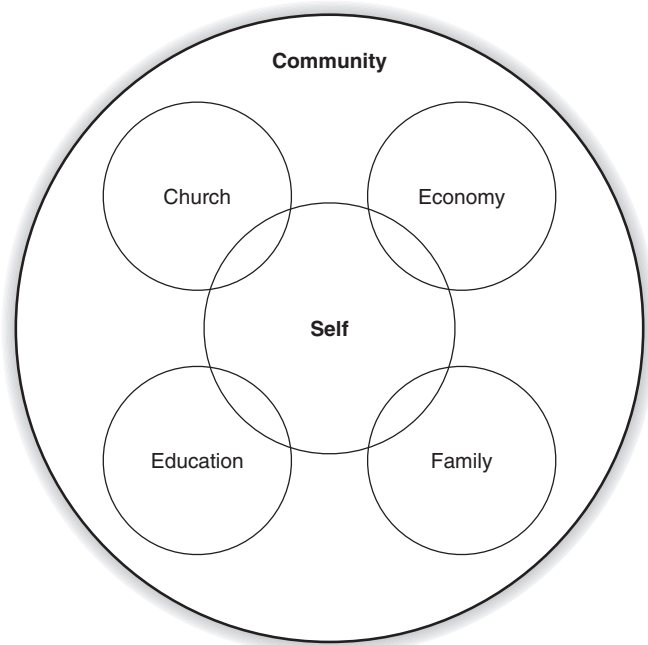
## Theory and Religion Today

Overall, the closer our narrative comes to the present day, the more we discover that religion becomes increasingly personal, and less institutional and collective. Believers see in Reagan whatever they want to see, and likewise in their perception of God. People see what they want to see, not what tradition, family, or society teaches. Although people still worship together, often in large numbers as we will see later with megachurches, they are mostly a crowd, not a coherent religious community. As a recent sociological study of youth and religion reveals, the vast majority of youth (12–24) as well as their parents, see God and/or Jesus as a personal helper, who answers prayers to accomplish whatever the individual desires, rather than seeing the individual as conforming to what God requires, or in sociological terms, what the community desires. Religion, whether explicitly religious or a kind of deified secularism, becomes increasingly commodified as modern society advances, such that religion subsumes as a form of conspicuous consumption. As Thorsten Veblen ([1899] 1994) writes, “persons engaged in conspicuous consumption not only derive gratification from the direct consumption but also from the heightened status reflected in the attitudes and opinions of others who observe their consumption” (p. 84). Today, we routinely see public declarations of piety, conspicuous professions of faith, which Veblen sees as a kind of consumption, a proclamation of loyalty to a particular brand. We now have three types of society, and each type configures religion according to the social relations that dominate each respective type.

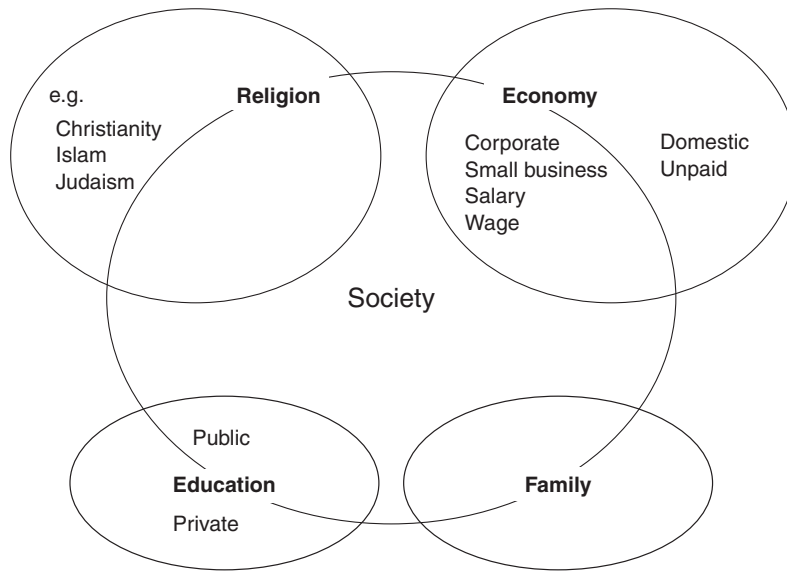
The three charts below show the differences between *gemeinschaft* religion, *gesellschaft* religion, and the most contemporary version, which we may call individualistic or *consumerist* religion.

In the *gemeinschaft*, a German term from Ferdinand Toennies ([1887] 2001) usually translated as “community,” the individual (the self) exists as an instance of the collective elements of the community (see Figure 1.7). It has no independent aspect. Similarly, the various institutions are always part of the larger collective, and here we refer to a church, in that a true *gemeinschaft*, such as a clan or tribe, has only one religious belief. Everyone believes and practices the same religion, in the same way, according to the same traditions. Overall, tradition governs all aspects of society. The forces of tradition—rituals, customs, obligations, status of birth and so on—leave little if any room for personal choice. People are born into and live within strong ties, forged by family, clan, religion, and other immutable facts of birth. Some term this a *community*, which emphasizes the close-knit and homogeneous nature of relationships.

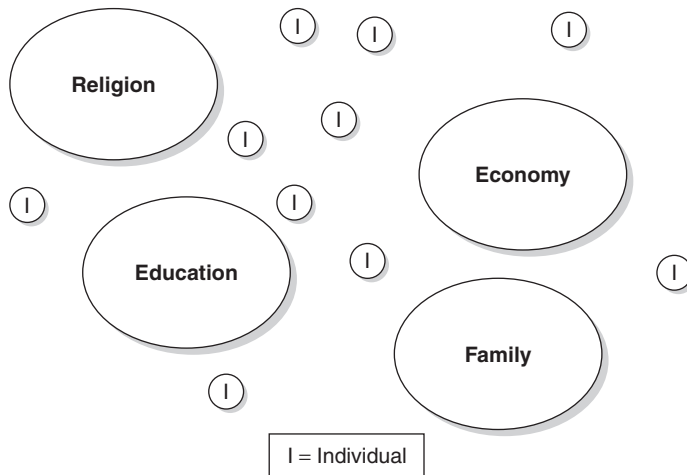
In the *gesellschaft*, also from Toennies, usually translated as “society,” each institution, as well as the individual, exists in both a public and private aspect (see Figure 1.8). No one person or group controls the entire society, and both individuals and groups have aspects of their lives that are separate from the society (private). Yet no one is entirely private or separate; everyone belongs or participates simultaneously as a private individual but also as a member of an association that the collective rules of society govern. The *gesellschaft* is a pluralistic society that recognizes and safeguards differences and also routinizes means of respectful interaction in terms of religion, ethnicity, and whatever else. Individuals form weak ties and enjoy a certain amount of choice unbound, at least formally, by the facts of their birth. They are called weak ties precisely because individuals may move between institutions, such as change religious membership. Thus a *society*, and in particular a modern society, consists of numerous but weak ties that emphasize the rationally



**Figure 1.7** Gemeinschaft



**Figure 1.8** Gesellschaft



**Figure 1.9** Consumerist Society

managed and pluralistic, heterogeneous nature of relationships. Collective coherence still exists, but typically by choice and convenience.

The consumerist type (from Erich Fromm) lacks any coherent collective aspects. Institutions and individuals have no particular relationship to each other, and people and groups change their relationship as desired or as particular conditions require (see Figure 1.9). Few particular or universal obligations exist, and people have rights, responsibilities, and privileges based on what they are able to purchase, whether with

money or other means of exchange. Religion thus becomes entirely a matter of personal choice, no more or less rigorous, public, or obdurate than the individual desires. People form only loose ties (Florida, 2004), which allows them to move easily from one set of relations to another. Some call this a *postmodern* condition, in which the social ceases to exist altogether and all relations become a matter of negotiation between ad hoc groups of individuals. This emphasizes the random and ever-changing nature of relationships. Without consistent institutional affiliation, each individual conspicuously declares allegiance to any given religion in order to adjust his or her status. As Fredric Jameson (1991) argues, personality becomes a collection of clothes, cars, music, and whatever else may be consumed conspicuously.

The rise of one type does not automatically or immediately cause the others to disappear. They often exist simultaneously, and perhaps in perpetuity. In that case, conflict arises based on different expectations of what life and religion should be like. Some people expect religion, for example, to consist of close ties through familial, neighborhood, or friendship networks, in which each person must make certain commitments to church and faith, for the good of the collective. This often requires that the individual defer personal gratification in some way so as to benefit the collective. In contrast, the postmodern person expects to readily move in and out of collective religious practice, as convenient, and to maintain such beliefs and values as the individual finds most comforting. God and the group serve the individual, rather than the reverse. In this context, contemporary scholars see the decline of the community (Antonio 1999; Florida 2004) for all but wealthy people who can buy community like any other commodity, or people willing to defer payment and benefits in favor of location and lifestyle.

In an attempt to regain strong ties, the sociologist Robert Antonio argues that highly cohesive and exclusionary tribes will arise, centered on class or religion or both, and this will only increase social conflict. The tribe has one belief, one lifestyle, and one people. Choice is irrelevant. Tribalism in this context thus refers to a system in which society breaks down into discrete groups, or tribes, each battling against all for power and resources.

Whether strong, weak, postmodern, or tribal, this means sociologically that importance moves away from the content of beliefs, away from the particulars of belief, and moves toward the type of relationship people and groups have to each other. In other words, the sociological perspective, while it does not dismiss the importance of beliefs, instead concentrates on social relations. As the classical theorists argue, neither the individual nor religion exists in a vacuum, but rather as part of a historical process, as part of a larger social context. Even in the postmodern case, people do still engage in social relationships, even if loosely and randomly. The very loose and random nature is itself significant. Modern society detaches people from traditional moorings and sets them free and alone in an ever-larger world, in which today the forces of globalization connect and combine once disparate cultures and traditions. In so doing, globalization also severs the individual from particularity, so that he or she is no longer bound to time and place. The individual becomes free, but also universal and alone—forever facing the vicissitudes of fate without the comfort of community. The greatest challenge today, perhaps, is to live in the immense global world, and yet retain the uniqueness of time and place from which we derive friendship, love, and meaning—in both life and death.