

Preface

There are many sociological theory texts currently available. So why produce another? What makes this text unique? How will the student reader benefit from it?

Rediscovery

Robert K. Merton once referred to the importance of giving “credit where credit was due” (1967:26). Sociological theory has not done that. By 1950, male scholarship had either ignored or marginalized women theorists and many others, excluding them from the history of social thought. However, in recent decades, increasing numbers of theorists and theory instructors have recognized that the “dead white male” approach to the history of social thought is at least incomplete, if not insidious.

In Chapter 2 of this text, Harriet Martineau is introduced as one of the founders of sociology. Throughout the book, the views of women theorists and others are represented in far more than token fashion. Thus, rediscovery means hearing the voices of important theorists such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Marianne Weber, Charlotte P. Gilman, and Rosa Luxemburg. It also means becoming acquainted with Joseph Schumpeter, V. I. Lenin, and—more recently—Niklas Luhmann, Theda Skocpol, contemporary Marxist Erik Olin Wright, the evolutionist Elman Service, Arlie Hochschild, Dorothy Smith, Patricia Hill Collins, and Immanuel Wallerstein.

This text, then, pays attention to the questions asked and the answers given by more than the “usual suspects.” Such rediscovery is intellectually exciting and challenging.

Organization

With the wealth of information covered, our aim is for readers always to be aware, chronologically and intellectually, of where they have been, where they are headed, and how the many different parts of their reading “journey” relate to one another. To accomplish this goal, we have organized the book as follows.

Classical and Contemporary Theories The first two chapters sketch the history of social thought until the mid-nineteenth century. Chapters 3–13 and 14–23 are divided at about 1930. This division is approximate because quite a few of the writers in Chapters 3–13 lived and wrote beyond 1930. For example, Sigmund Freud lived to 1939, Beatrice Webb to 1943, Schumpeter to 1950, and Du Bois to 1963. However, the chapter division reflects the early and the later generations of sociological theorists. In a somewhat arbitrary fashion, Talcott

Parsons and Robert Merton in Chapter 14 may be viewed as the beginning point for contemporary theory.¹

Schools of Thought A key organizing principle of this text is to trace the following major schools of thought as they appear and reappear from chapter to chapter.

1. *Functionalism*, from Herbert Spencer through Durkheim, Parsons, and Merton, to Luhmann.
2. *Evolutionism*, from Spencer through W. G. Sumner to Service. Together these two sociological theories have generally been supportive of the status quo. Thus, they are treated as baseline theories to which many others have reacted.
3. The anticapitalist *revolutionary and conflict perspective* begins in the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and we trace it through Lenin and Luxemburg to Raya Dunayevskaya, Nicos Poulantzas, and Erik Olin Wright.
4. A closely allied brand of theorizing is *critical of capitalism* but is less optimistic about curing its ills. This is traced from Thorstein Veblen and Du Bois, through the pre-World War II Frankfurt School, to Wallerstein and Michel Foucault.
5. The *complexities* of history and social action are found in the works of Max Weber and Georg Simmel, theorists who should not be pigeonholed within a single theoretical school.
6. Reactions to the *political and economic aspects* of Marxism can be seen in the writings of Vilfredo Pareto and Robert Michels as well as Veblen and Schumpeter.
7. An important theoretical perspective in this book concerns gender or *feminism*. In this book we introduce the works of Gilman, Dunayevskaya, Smith, and Collins, among others.
8. The *micro*-perspectives on society theorize about the self and interaction. They are traced from C. H. Cooley, G. H. Mead, and Freud to Erving Goffman and Hochschild.

While these are among the major theoretical schools introduced, other branches of the sociological “tree” also appear throughout the chapters.

Consistent Organization Within Chapters Readers new to sociological theory often face the “forest and trees” problem—that is, they become immersed in the details of one theory after another and are unable to compare or relate them. This problem becomes particularly difficult in texts that do not provide consistent means for making connections. We address this problem by fol-

¹It is worth noting that we also plan to divide this text into two brief volumes, so that those who teach separate courses on classical or contemporary theory will be able to use the appropriate brief text, along with appropriate supporting materials.

lowing a consistent organizational scheme within the chapters. After covering the setting and background of a particular theorist or school of thought, each chapter follows a pattern of presentation that includes:

- Central Theories and Methods
- Nature of Society, Humans, and Change
- Class, Gender, and Race
- Other Theories and Theorists
- Critiques and Conclusions
- Final Thoughts

The section entitled “Nature of Society, Humans, and Change” examines a theorist’s fundamental assumptions underpinning his or her theoretical views, often leading to a consideration of the theorist’s ideology—what that individual thought was good or bad, right or wrong, better or worse about society and human nature. Each chapter includes a “Class, Gender, and Race” section, with one or more of these topics sometimes being the primary focus of a particular thinker. For example, Wright focuses on class, Gilman and Smith on gender, and Collins on race and gender. We devote a section of each chapter to these topics—despite the fact that not every theorist treats them thoroughly—because the broad theme of *inequality* is an important one in this textbook.

An important section of each chapter is “Other Theories and Theorists.” This section presents theoretical issues less central to the writer, but nevertheless noteworthy. For example, in the “Other Theories” section of Chapter 14, we introduce Merton’s “self-fulfilling prophecy.” In this section we also connect the theorist under consideration to others who are directly referred to in the theorist’s work but who have not yet been discussed in that chapter; at times we also relate the theorist to others whose ideas have some connections. The “Critiques and Conclusions” section summarizes the ideas of the theorist or theorists considered in that chapter and presents criticisms of each theorist from critics of their own day as well as critics of today. Each chapter closes with “Final Thoughts,” sometimes poignant, sometimes ironic, and sometimes offering a broader view.

Important Themes in Sociological Theory That Cut Across Chapters

We also seek to help students recognize connections across social theories by noting additional key *themes* beyond those included in the chapter headings, themes that recur as theoretical topics. These consistent themes include the following:

- The characteristics of modern societies
- Attitudes toward capitalism
- Power and inequality in society
- Relationship of the individual to society

As these themes appear and reappear throughout the chapters, the terms are *italicized* so that students can more easily make connections across chapters.

Additional Learning and Teaching Features

In addition to the content, organization, and thematic innovations of this book, several other learning and teaching features are worth noting. First, a *Timeline* in a four-panel fold-out in the back of the book places all the theorists clearly into their historical periods. The theorist's life span, and the chapter in which she or he appears in this book, are superimposed on important world events occurring during that time. The birth and death dates of each theorist help readers relate the theorists to one another. Students can also see and remember which theorists are alive in the year 2001.

Each of the nine major sections in this book begins with a *section introduction* that ties the individual chapters to each other in groupings, usually focusing on a school of thought and helping the student look both backward and forward.

Key terms are **boldfaced** in the text when they are first defined and discussed, and they are also boldfaced in the index.

The *References* at the end of each chapter include both the original publication date and the republication date, if any, of the edition referred to or quoted in this volume.

Brevity

A central goal of this text is to be as concise as possible while also doing justice to a wide variety of theorists. The text may seem long, but the table of contents shows that the theorists and breadth of theoretical issues covered are also quite extensive. Instead of covering 4 to 12 theorists, we give substantial treatment of some 45 thinkers. Our intention has been to cast the net widely enough to capture diversity both within and between theoretical viewpoints or schools of thought. Thus, given the range of ideas, historical contexts, and theorists covered, we believe this book is indeed brief.

Limitations of This Book

This text covers a large number of theories and theorists as cogently as possible. There are, however, two limitations. First, we have not introduced the important non-Western views of society. Confucius produced a philosophical and theoretical basis for understanding Chinese society. Ibn Khaldun, in the fourteenth century, explained society from a North African perspective. Recently, Kwame Gyekye (1987, 1997), a Ghanaian thinker, has written about the nature of society as viewed from within his culture. A compendium of world sociological ideas needs to be attempted, but this volume is not it. We believe it is enough to rediscover the women theorists and others, such as Du Bois, and to bring them into the corpus of Western sociological theory.

A second limitation is that, despite covering more than 40 major thinkers, we may have included a theorist considered by one instructor to be superfluous and left out another's favorite classical or contemporary thinker. One might question why we have included Service on evolutionary thought, Wright on contemporary Marxism, or Hochschild on symbolic interactionism. The justification for each of them is that each does an outstanding job of bringing together

and contributing to the issues in his or her theoretical specialty. After expending considerable effort sorting through contemporary theorists, we decided that the ones included are the best for both creative and summary purposes. No one knows, of course, whether Luhmann, Poulantzas, or Coleman will be considered an important theorist 25 years from now.

If we have omitted one of your favorite theorists, you can introduce that particular thinker through supplementary materials. We optimistically think this will be necessary in only a very limited number of cases.

We hope you and your students will find the pages that follow to be worthwhile and exciting to read as we have found them to write during these past five years. We welcome your criticisms and suggestions as well as those of your students. Please write to us in care of Pine Forge Press, or email us at adams@ssc.wisc.edu.

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A Note to Students

You as Theorist

Are you already a social theorist? Think about the following questions: Do some people have the cards stacked in their favor, while others have them stacked against, or do we all get pretty much what we deserve? Do you act the same way at a basketball game, in a bar, in a grocery store, and at a religious service, or do you behave differently as you move from place to place? Why are people in one country always fighting, while in another they seem so peaceful? Are they peaceful because they like one another or because some keep others under control?

Are men and women actually pretty much the same, except for their roles in childbearing? As my friend Steve says, “Well, you know how women are.” As Maureen jokes, “Why is it men won’t ever ask for directions?” Just what is it that women, or men, really want? And why? Why do politicians change their message “at the drop of a hat” to suit their audience? Do they really believe in anything? “The more things change, the more they stay the same”—how could that be, and what does it mean?

“What is good for General Motors (or Toyota) is good for the country”—is that true? Why does the head of General Motors make a seven-figure salary, a doctor six figures, a school teacher five, and a day care provider four? Does the salary correspond to how hard they work, or how long they went to school, or how smart they are? Is the world actually run by money? If so, what does it mean to “run the world”?

Whenever you make any of these comments, or ask or answer any of these questions, you are a social theorist. You theorize whenever you try to make sense of, understand, or explain your social world. This book introduces you to insightful and interesting answers that have been proposed over the years to these and other such questions. It does not tell you what to think, but helps you clarify your own thoughts, relate your various views of society to each other and to the views of others.

How can the study of sociological theory help you understand your world? An example, addressed in this text, may help answer that question. In our society many believe that success or failure is basically an individual matter, that no one should be allowed to stand in the way of your success, and that wealth is the best measure of success. However, not all societies have these as central values. In fact, in some societies the individual is expected to subordinate herself or himself to the good of the family or community. Such societies deemphasize the unique personality and may also limit worldly gain. Theorists have explained how such societies got that way and why such societies make sense to those who live in them. The study of different sorts of societies is not intended to make an individual less committed to his or her own society and its values, but such a study may at least broaden the individual’s perspective on, and comprehension of, the varieties of workable human societies.

How This Book Is Organized

One organizing principle of this book is its division of theorists into thinkers of the *pre- and post-1930* periods, with the first 13 chapters covering the earlier time. Although some writers in the first 13 chapters lived beyond 1930, those in Chapters 14–23 did all their writing from 1930 on. Answers to the kinds of questions raised at the beginning of this Note to Students tend to be joined together into *schools of thought*. For example, those who believe people get what they deserve are apt also to believe that society exists because people like one another and like where they live. Such clusters or schools of thought are presented in most of the groupings of chapters in sections of this text. For example, you will find in Chapters 3, 4, and 14 the thoughts of those who believe that the various parts of society work together for the good of the whole and satisfy those living within it. Likewise, Chapters 5, 6, and 17 examine the theories of those who believe society is oppressive and is run by a small number of individuals who keep the others under control. Most chapters focus on one or more individuals who represent a particular school of thought.

Internally, chapters are organized consistently according to the following topics:

1. Central Theories and Methods
2. The Nature of Humans, Society, and Change
3. Class, Gender, and Race
4. Other Theories and Theorists
5. Critiques and Conclusions
6. Final Thoughts

The consistency of chapter organization makes it easier to compare, contrast, and relate the issues raised by one theorist with those raised by another. Another way we have tried to ease your way through this book is the introduction of *themes* that run through the volume. Some of the headings listed above, such as change, class, gender, and race, are also themes. Other important themes include how individual theorists have thought about the characteristics of modern society, what their attitudes are concerning capitalism, their views on power and inequality in society and on how individuals and society affect each other.

You have glimpsed the great variety of issues—some of which you already have an opinion about and some of which you may never have thought about before. Putting your views of society into this larger context is an adventure in learning and understanding. So let us begin the journey together.