1 AN INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Introduction

Humans are social beings. Whether we like it or not, nearly everything we do in our lives takes place in the company of others. Few of our activities are truly solitary and scarce are the times when we are really alone. Thus the study of how we are able to interact with one another, and what happens when we do, would seem to be one of the most fundamental concerns of anyone interested in human life. Yet strangely enough, it was not until relatively recently – from about the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards – that a specialist interest in this intrinsically social aspect of human existence was treated with any seriousness. Before that time, and even since, other kinds of interests have dominated the analysis of human life. Two of the most resilient, non-social approaches to human behaviour have been **'naturalistic'** and **'individualistic'** explanations.

Rather than seeing social behaviour as the product of interaction, these theories have concentrated on the presumed qualities inherent in individuals. On the one hand, naturalistic explanations suppose that all human behaviour – social interaction included – is a product of the inherited dispositions we possess as animals. We are, like animals, biologically programmed by nature. On the other hand, individualistic explanations baulk at such grand generalizations about the inevitability of behaviour. From this point of view we are all 'individual' and 'different'. Explanations of human behaviour must therefore always rest ultimately on the particular and unique psychological qualities of individuals. Sociological theories are in direct contrast to these

'non-social' approaches. Looking a little closer at them, and discovering what is wrong or incomplete about them, makes it easier to understand why sociological theories exist.

Naturalistic theories

Naturalistic explanations of human activity are common enough. For example, in our society it is often argued that it is only natural for a man and a woman to fall in love, get married and have children. It is equally natural for this nuclear family to live as a unit on their own, with the husband going out to work to earn resources for his dependants, while his wife, at least for the early years of her children's lives, devotes herself to looking after them – to being a mother. As they grow up and acquire more independence, it is still only 'natural' for the children to live at home with their parents, who are responsible for them, at least until their late teens. By then it is only natural for them to want to 'leave the nest', to start to 'make their own way in the world' and, in particular, to look for marriage partners. Thus they, too, can start families of their own.

The corollary of these 'natural' practices is that it is somehow *un*-natural not to want to get married, or to marry for reasons other than love. It is equally unnatural for a couple not to want to have children, or for wives not to want to be mothers, or for mothers not to want to devote the whole of their lives to child-rearing. Though it is not right or natural for children to leave home much younger than eighteen, it is certainly not natural for them not to want to leave home at all in order to start a family of their own. However, these 'unnatural' desires and practices are common enough in our society. There are plenty of people who prefer to stay single, or 'marry with an eye on the main chance'. There are plenty of women who do not like the idea of motherhood, and there is certainly any number of women who do not want to spend their lives solely being wives and mothers. There are plenty of children who want to leave home long before they are eighteen while there are many who are quite happy to stay as members of their parents' households until long after that age.

Why is this? If human behaviour is, in fact, the product of a disposition inherent in the nature of the human being then why are such deviations from what is 'natural' so common? We can hardly put down the widespread existence of such 'unnatural' patterns of behaviour to some kind of large-scale, faulty genetic programming.

In any case, why are there so many variations from these notions of 'normal' family practices in other kinds of human societies? Both

history and anthropology provide us with stark contrasts in family life. In his book on family life in Medieval Europe, *Centuries of Childhood* (1973), Philippe Ariès paints a picture of marriage, the family and child-rearing which sharply contradicts our notions of normality. Families were not then, as they are for us today, private and isolated units, cut off socially, and physically separated from the world at large. Families were deeply embedded in the community, with people living essentially public, rather than private, lives. They lived in households whose composition was constantly shifting: relatives, friends, children, visitors, passers-by and animals all slept under the same roof. Marriage was primarily a means of forging alliances rather than simply the outcome of 'love', while women certainly did not look upon mothering as their sole destiny. Indeed, child-rearing was a far less demanding and onerous task than it is in our world. Children were not cosseted and coddled to anywhere near the extent we consider 'right'. Many more people – both other relatives and the community at large – were involved in child-rearing, and childhood lasted a far shorter time than it does today. As Ariès (1973) puts it, 'as soon as he had been weaned, or soon after, the child became the natural companion of the adult'.

In contemporary non-industrial societies, too, there is a wide range of variations in family practices. Here again, marriage is essentially a means of establishing alliances between groups, rather than simply a relationship between individuals. Monogamy – one husband and one wife – is only one form of marriage. Polygyny, marriage between a husband and more than one wife, and polyandry, between a wife and more than one husband, are found in many societies. Domestic life is also far more public and communal than it is in industrial societies. Each family unit is just a part of a much wider, cooperating group of mainly blood relatives associated with a local territory, usually a village. As in Medieval Europe, therefore, child-rearing is not considered the principal responsibility of parents alone, but involves a far greater number of people, relatives and non-relatives.

Clearly, then, to hope to explain human life simply by reference to natural impulses common to all is to ignore the one crucial fact that sociology directs attention to: human behaviour varies according to the social settings in which people find themselves.

Individualistic theories

What of individualistic explanations? How useful is the argument that behaviour is the product of the psychological make-up of individuals? The employment of this kind of theory is extremely common. For

example, success or failure in education is often assumed to be merely a reflection of intelligence: bright children succeed and dim children fail. Criminals are often taken to be people with certain kinds of personality: they are usually seen as morally deficient individuals, lacking any real sense of right or wrong. Unemployed people are equally often condemned as 'work-shy', 'lazy' or 'scroungers' – inadequates who would rather 'get something for nothing' than work for it. Suicide is seen as the act of an unstable person – an act undertaken when, as coroners put it, 'the balance of the mind was disturbed'. This kind of explanation is attractive for many people and has proved particularly resilient to sociological critique. But a closer look shows it to be seriously flawed.

If educational achievement is simply a reflection of intelligence then why do children from manual workers' homes do so badly compared with children from middle-class homes? It is clearly nonsensical to suggest that doing one kind of job rather than another is likely to determine the intelligence of your child. Achievement in education must in some way be influenced by the characteristics of a child's background.

Equally, the fact that the majority of people convicted of a crime come from certain social categories must cast serious doubt on the 'deficient personality' theory. The conviction rate is highest for young males, especially blacks, who come from manual, working-class or unemployed backgrounds. Can we seriously believe that criminal personalities are likely to be concentrated in such *social* categories? As in the case of educational achievement, it is clear that the conviction of criminals must somehow be influenced by social factors.

Again, is it likely that the million or so people presently unemployed are typically uninterested in working when the vast majority of them have been forced out of their jobs, either by 'downsizing' or by the failure of the companies they worked for – as a result of social forces quite outside their control?

Suicide would seem to have the strongest case for being explained as a purely psychological act. But if it is simply a question of 'an unsound mind', then why does the rate of suicide vary between societies? Why does it vary between different groups within the same society? Also, why do the rates within groups and societies remain remarkably constant over time? As in other examples, social factors must be exerting some kind of influence; explanations at the level of the personality are clearly not enough.

Variations such as these demonstrate the inadequacy of theories of human behaviour which exclusively emphasize innate natural drives,

or the unique psychological make-up of individuals. If nature is at the root of behaviour, why does it vary according to social settings? If we are all different individuals acting according to the dictates of unique psychological influences, why do different people in the same social circumstances behave similarly and in ways others can understand? Clearly there is a social dimension to human existence, which requires sociological theorizing to explain it.

All sociological theories thus have in common an emphasis on the way human belief and **action** is the product of social influences. They differ as to what these influences are, and how they should be investigated and explained. This book is about these differences.

We shall now examine three distinct kinds of theory – *consensus*, *conflict* and *action* theories – each of which highlights specific social sources of human behaviour. Though none of the sociologists whose work we will spend the rest of the book examining falls neatly into any one of these three categories of theory, discussing them now will produce two benefits:

- it will serve as an accessible introduction to theoretical debates in sociology; and
- it will act as useful reference points against which to judge and compare the work of the subject's major theorists.

Society as a structure of rules

The influence of culture on behaviour

Imagine you live in a big city. How many people do you know well? Twenty? Fifty? A hundred? Now consider how many other people you encounter each day, about whom you know nothing. For example, how many complete strangers do people living in London or Manchester or Birmingham come into contact with each day? On the street, in shops, on buses and trains, in cinemas or night clubs – everyday life in a big city is a constant encounter with complete strangers. Yet even if city dwellers bothered to reflect on this fact, they would not normally leave their homes quaking with dread about how all these hundreds of strangers would behave towards them. Indeed, they hardly, if ever, think about it. Why? Why do we take our ability to cope with strangers so much for granted? It is because nearly all the people we encounter in our everyday lives do behave in ways we expect. We expect bus passengers, shoppers, taxi-drivers,

passers-by, and so on, to behave in quite definite ways even though we know nothing about them personally. City dwellers in particular – though it is true of all of us to some extent – routinely enter settings where others are going about their business both expecting not to know them, and yet also expecting to know how they will behave. And, more than this, we are nearly always absolutely right in both respects. We are only surprised if we encounter someone who is *not* a stranger – 'Fancy meeting you here! Isn't it a small world!' – or if one of these strangers actually does behave strangely – 'Mummy, why is that man shouting and waving his arms about?' Why is this? Why do others do what we expect of them? Why is *dis*order or the *un*expected among strangers so rare?

Structural-consensus theory

One of the traditional ways in which sociologists explain the order and predictability of social life is by regarding human behaviour as *learned* behaviour. This approach is known – for reasons that will become apparent – as *structural-consensus* theory. The key process this theory emphasizes is called *socialization.* This term refers to the way in which human beings learn the kinds of behaviour expected of them in the social settings in which they find themselves. From this point of view, societies differ because the kinds of behaviour considered appropriate in them differ. People in other societies think and behave differently because they have learned different rules about how to behave and think. The same goes for different groups within the same society. The actions and ideas of one group differ from those of another because its members have been socialized into different rules.

Consensus sociologists use the term *culture* to describe the rules that govern thought and behaviour in a society. Culture exists prior to the people who learn it. At birth, humans are confronted by a social world already in existence. Joining this world involves learning 'how things are done' in it. Only by learning the cultural rules of a society can a human interact with other humans. Because they have been similarly socialized, different individuals will behave similarly.

Consensus theory thus argues that a society's cultural rules determine, or *structure*, the behaviour of its members, channelling their actions in certain ways rather than others. They do so in much the same way that the physical construction of a building structures the actions of the people inside it. Take the behaviour of students in a

school. Once inside the school they will display quite regular patterns of behaviour. They will all walk along corridors, up and down stairs, in and out of classrooms, through doors, and so on. They will, by and large, not attempt to dig through floors, smash through walls, or climb out of windows. Their physical movements are constrained by the school building. Since this affects all the students similarly, their behaviour inside the school will be similar – and will exhibit quite definite patterns. In consensus theory, the same is true of social life. Individuals will behave similarly in the same social settings because they are equally constrained by cultural rules. Though these **social structures** are not visible in the way physical structures are, those who are socialized into their rules find them comparably determining.

The levels at which these cultural rules operate can vary. Some rules, like laws for instance, operate at the level of the whole society and structure the behaviour of everyone who lives in it. Others are much less general, structuring the behaviour of people in quite specific social settings. For example, children in a classroom are expected to behave in an orderly and attentive fashion. In the playground much more license is given them, while away from school their behaviour often bears little resemblance to that expected of them during school hours. Similarly, when police officers or nurses or members of the armed forces are 'on duty', certain cultural rules structure their behaviour very rigidly. Out of uniform and off duty these constraints do not apply, though other ones do instead – those governing their behaviour as fathers and mothers, or husbands and wives, for instance.

This shows how the theory of a social structure of cultural rules operates. The rules apply not to the individuals themselves, but to the positions in the social structure they occupy. Shoppers, police officers, traffic wardens, schoolteachers or pupils are constrained by the cultural expectations attached to these positions, but only when they occupy them. In other circumstances, in other locations in the social structure – as fathers or mothers, squash players, football supporters, church members, and so on – other rules come into play.

Sociologists call positions in a social structure *roles*. The rules that structure the behaviour of their occupants are called *norms*. There are some cultural rules that are not attached to any particular role or set of roles. Called *values*, these are in a sense summaries of approved ways of living, and act as a base from which particular norms spring. So, for example: 'education should be the key to success'; 'family relationships should be the most important thing to protect'; 'self-help should be the means to individual fulfilment'. All these are values, and they provide general principles from which norms

directing behaviour in schools and colleges, in the home and at work are derived.

According to this sociological theory, socialization into norms and values produces agreement, or *consensus*, between people about appropriate behaviour and beliefs without which no human society can survive. This is why it is called structural-consensus theory. Through socialization, cultural rules structure behaviour, guarantee a consensus about expected behaviour, and thereby ensure social order.

Clearly, in a complex society there are sometimes going to be competing norms and values. For example, while some people think it is wrong for mothers to go out to work, many women see motherhood at best as a real imposition and at worst as an infringement of their liberty. Children often encourage each other to misbehave at school and disapprove of their peers who refuse to do so. Teachers usually see this very much the other way round! The Tory Party Conference is annually strident in its condemnation of any speaker who criticizes the police. Some young blacks would be equally furious with any of their number who had other than a strongly belligerent attitude towards them.

Consensus theorists explain such differences in behaviour and attitude in terms of the existence of alternative cultural influences, characteristic of different social settings. A good example of this emphasis is their approach to educational inequality.

Educational inequality: a consensus theory analysis

Educational research demonstrates, in the most conclusive fashion, that achievement in education is strongly linked to class membership, gender and ethnic origin. There is overwhelming evidence, for example, that working-class children of similar intelligence to children from middle-class backgrounds achieve far less academically than their middle-class counterparts.

To explain this, consensus theorists turn to stock concepts in their approach to social life – norms, values, socialization and culture. Starting from the basic assumption that behaviour and belief are caused by socialization into particular rules, their explanation of working-class underachievement in education seeks to identify:

• the cultural influences which propel middle-class children to academic success
• the cultural influences which drag working-class children down to mediocrity.

The argument usually goes something like this. The upbringing of middle-class children involves socialization into norms and values that are ideal for educational achievement. Because of their own educational experiences, middle-class parents are likely to be very knowledgeable about how education works and how to make the most of it. Further, they are likely to be very keen for their children to make a success of their own education. These children will thus grow up in a social setting where educational achievement is valued and where they will be constantly encouraged and assisted to fulfil their academic potential.

In contrast, the home background of working-class children often lacks such advantageous socialization. Working-class parents are likely to have had only limited, and possibly unhappy, experiences of education. Even if they are keen for their children to achieve educational success, they will almost certainly lack the know-how of the middle-class parent to make this happen. Indeed, sometimes they may actively disapprove of academic attainment; for instance, they may simply distrust what they do not know. As a result, their children may well be taught instead to value the more immediate and practical advantages of leaving school as soon as possible. For example, boys may be encouraged to 'learn a trade' – to eschew academic success for the security of an apprenticeship in 'a proper job'.

Consensus theory: conclusion

Here is a clear example of the application of consensus theory to the facts of social life. From this theoretical point of view, different patterns of behaviour are the product of different patterns of socialization. It might seem that this contradicts the commitment of these theorists to the idea that social order in a society is the outcome of an agreement or a consensus among its members about how to behave and what to think. But consensus theorists say that despite differences of culture between different groups, even despite opposing sub-cultures within the overall culture, in all societies an overall consensus prevails. This is because all societies have certain values about the importance of which there is no dispute. They are called either *central values* or *core values*, and socialization ensures everyone conforms to them.

In Victorian Britain two central values were a commitment to Christian morality, and loyalty to the Queen and the British Empire. Today, examples of central values in a Western capitalist society might be the importance of economic growth, the importance of democratic institutions, the importance of the rule of law, and the importance of

the freedom of the individual within the law. (Indeed, anything trotted out as 'basic to our country's way of life' at any particular time is usually a central value in a society.)

For consensus theory then, central values are the backbone of social structures, built and sustained by the process of socialization. Social behaviour and social order are determined by external cultural forces. Social life is possible because of the existence of social structures of cultural rules.

Society as a structure of inequality

The influence of advantages and disadvantages on behaviour

Other sociologists argue a rather different theoretical case. They agree that society determines our behaviour by structuring or constraining it. But they emphasize different structural constraints. For them, the most important influence on social life is the distribution of advantage and its impact on behaviour. Where advantages are unequally distributed, the opportunities of the advantaged to choose how to behave are much greater than those of the disadvantaged.

Educational inequality: an alternative analysis

For example, while it is perfectly feasible for two boys of the same intelligence to be equally keen to fulfil their potential in education and to be equally encouraged by their parents, their culturally instilled enthusiasm cannot, by itself, tell us everything about their potential educational successes or failures. If one boy comes from a wealthy home, while the other is from a much poorer one, this will be far more significant for their education than their similar (learned) desire. Clearly, the unequal distribution of advantage – in this case material resources – will assist the privileged boy and hamper the disadvantaged one.

The advantaged boy's parents can buy a private education, while those of the poorer boy cannot. The advantaged boy can be assured of living in a substantial enough house, with sufficient space to study, whereas the disadvantaged boy may have to make do with a room with the television in it, or a bedroom shared with his brothers and sisters. The advantaged boy can rely on a proper diet and resulting good health, whereas the disadvantaged boy cannot. The advantaged

boy can be guaranteed access to all the books and equipment he needs to study, whereas the disadvantaged boy cannot. Probably most importantly, the advantaged boy will be able to continue his education up to the limit of his potential unhindered. For those who are less advantaged it is often necessary to leave school and go out to work to add to the family income. This stronger impulse usually brings education to a premature end.

Structural-conflict theory

So, one primary objection some sociologists have to structural-consensus theory is that where societies are unequal, people are not only constrained by the norms and values they have learnt via socialization. Such theorists argue that it has to be recognized that people are also constrained by the advantages they possess – by their position in the structures of inequality within their society. This emphasis on the effects on behaviour of an unequal distribution of advantage in a society is usually associated with *structural-conflict* theory. Why are such theories called conflict theories?

The kinds of inequality structures in a society vary. Ethnic groups can be unequal, young and old can be unequal, men and women can be unequal, people doing different jobs can be unequal, people of different religious beliefs can be unequal, and so on. The kinds of advantages unequally possessed by such groups can vary, too. Different groups can possess unequal amounts of power, authority, prestige, or wealth, or a combination of these and other advantages.

Notwithstanding the different kinds of inequality conflict theories focus on, and the different kinds of advantages they see as unequally distributed, such theories nonetheless have in common the axiom that the origin and persistence of a structure of inequality lies in the domination of its disadvantaged groups by its advantaged ones. Conflict theories are so-called because for them, inherent in an unequal society is an inevitable *conflict of interests* between its 'haves' and its 'have-nots'. As Wes Sharrock (1977) puts it:

> The conflict view is . . . founded upon the assumption that . . . any society . . . may provide extraordinarily good lives for some but this is usually only possible because the great majority are oppressed and degraded . . . Differences of interest are therefore as important to society as agreements upon rules and values, and most societies are so organised that they not only provide greater benefits for some than for

others but in such a way that the accrual of benefits to a few causes positive discomfort to others. (pp. 515–16)

So conflict theory differs from consensus theory not only because it is interested in the way an unequal distribution of advantage in a society structures behaviour, but also because it is interested in the conflict, not the consensus, inherent in such a society. According to conflict theory, there is a conflict of interest between a society's advantaged and disadvantaged, which is inherent in their relationship.

However, there is another conflict theory objection to consensus theory too. Conflict theorists not only accuse consensus theorists of putting too much emphasis on norms and values as determinants of behaviour at the expense of other influences. They also argue that in any case, consensus theory misunderstands and therefore misinterprets the role of its key concern – socialization into culture.

Ideas as instruments of power

Consensus theory argues that people behave as they do because they have been socialized into cultural rules. The outcome is a consensus about how to think and behave, which manifests itself in patterns and regularities of behaviour. In contrast, conflict theorists argue that we should see the role of cultural rules and the process of socialization in a very different light. For them, the real structural determinants of behaviour are the rewards and advantages possessed unequally by different groups in a society. Other things being equal, those most disadvantaged would not put up with such a state of affairs. Normally, however, other things are *not* equal. Where a society is unequal, the only way it can survive is if those who are disadvantaged in it come to accept their deprivation. Sometimes this involves naked coercion. Plenty of unequal societies survive because their rulers maintain repressive regimes based on terror. However, the exercise of the force necessary to maintain unequal advantage need not take such an obvious or naked form. There are two other related ways in which structures of inequality can survive – and with a surer future than by the naked use of force. First, it can do so if those most disadvantaged by them can somehow be prevented from seeing themselves as underprivileged, or second, even if this is recognized, it can do so if they can be persuaded that this is fair enough – that the inequality is rightful, legitimate and just. According to the conflict view, the way this happens is through the control and manipulation of the norms and values – the cultural rules – into which people are socialized. In effect then,

for conflict theorists, far from being the means to social order via consensus, socialization is much more likely to be an instrument of power – producing social order by means of force and domination.

Imagine the following scenario. It is early morning in a Latin American country. A group of agricultural labourers, both men and women, are waiting by a roadside for a bus to arrive to drive them to work. Suddenly two vans draw up and four hooded men jump out. At gunpoint they order the labourers into the backs of the vans, which then race away deep into the surrounding countryside. At nightfall they are abandoned and the labourers transferred into a large covered lorry. This is driven through the night, deep into the mountains. Before daybreak it reaches its destination – a huge underground mine, built deep into the heart of a mountain. Here the labourers are horrified to find a vast army of slaves toiling away, under constant surveillance by brutal guards. After being given a meagre meal, the labourers are forced to join this workforce.

As they live out their desperate lives within this mountain world, some of the slaves try to escape. When caught they are publicly punished as a deterrent to others. Two attempts to escape result in public execution. As the labourers get older, they rely on each other for companionship, and on their memories for comfort. They keep sane by recounting stories of their former lives. In the fullness of time, children are born to them. The parents are careful to tell these children all about their past. As the children grow up and have children of their own, they, too, are told tales of their grandparents' land of lost content. But for them these are handed-down, historical stories, not tales based on experience. As the years go by, though the facts of life within the mountain remain the same, the perception of life in it by the participants alters. By the time five or six generations of slaves have been born, their knowledge of the world of their ancestors' past lives has become considerably diminished. It is still talked about, sometimes. But by now it is a misted world of folklore and myth. All they know from experience is slavery. So far as any of them can remember, they have always been slaves. In their world, slavery is 'normal'. In effect, to be a slave means something very different to them from what it meant to their ancestors.

A similar process occurs with the oppressors. As the slaves' view of themselves has altered over time, so the necessity for naked force has become less and less. As, through socialization, their subordinates have begun to acquiesce in their own subordination, the guards no longer brandish guns and clubs. Because of this, they no longer see themselves as the original guards did. Both the dominant and the

subordinate, knowing nothing else, have, through socialization, come to see the inequality in their world in a very different light from the original inhabitants.

Though this story is rather larger-than-life, it does allow us to see the role of socialization into cultural rules as conflict theorists see it. Their argument is that we must be careful not to dismiss the presence of conflict in societies just because a consensus seems to prevail. Naked force is only necessary so long as people see themselves as oppressed. If they can be persuaded that they are not oppressed, or if they fail to see that they are, then they can be willing architects in the design of their own subordination. The easiest way to exercise power, and gain advantage as a result, is for the dominated to be complicit in their own subordination.

Conflict theorists tell us that rather than simply describe cultural rules in a society, therefore, we must carefully examine their content. We must ask: 'Who *benefits* from the *particular* set of rules prevailing in this society, rather than some other set?' Cultural rules cannot be neutral or all-benevolent. Of course, consensus theorists are right to say that people are socialized into pre-existing norms and values. But for conflict theorists this tells us only half the story. We must also find out whether some groups benefit more than others from the existence of a particular set of rules and have a greater say in their construction and interpretation. If they do, then the process of socialization into these is an instrument of their advantage – it is an instrument of their power.

Ideas exercising power: the example of gender inequality legitimation

For example, even a cursory glance at the kinds of occupations held by women and the kinds of rewards they receive for doing them clearly indicates the advantages men have over women in our society. Of course, Britain once had a female prime minister, and today has some female civil servants, MPs, judges, and university vice-chancellors as well an increasing number of women in leading positions in business. But this cannot hide the fact that there is still markedly unequal occupational opportunity, and unequal economic reward, based on gender. The facts are that males dominate the best-rewarded and most prestigious occupations and (despite the Equal Opportunities Commission) usually receive greater rewards when they perform the same jobs as women.

Clearly, there is a considerable potential conflict of interests between men and women here. It is in men's interests for women not to

compete in large numbers for the limited number of highly rewarded jobs. It is in men's interests for women to stay at home and provide domestic services for them. If women were to want something different, this would conflict with the desires, interests and ambitions of men.

So why is it that so many women do *not* object to this state of affairs? If women are as systematically deprived of occupational opportunities and rewards by men as this, why do so many of them acquiesce in their deprivation? For example, why are some of the fiercest critics of the feminist movement women? Why do so many women *choose* to be (unpaid) houseworkers for the benefit of their husbands and children? Why is the extent of so many girls' ambitions to 'start a family'? Why do they not wish to explore their potential in other activities instead, or as well?

Clearly, a substantial part of the answers to these questions is that women have been socialized into accepting this definition of themselves. For conflict theorists, this is a clear example of particular norms and values working in the interests of one section of society and against another. Through the ideas they have learned, women have been forced to accept a role that is subordinate to men.

There is one final question to be asked about this theoretical approach. How does the exercise of force by means of socialization into particular ideas happen? Conflict theorists say it can be intentional or unintentional. The rulers of many societies in the world today deliberately employ propaganda to persuade the ruled of the legitimacy of this arrangement. They also often control and censor mass media in their countries, to ensure lack of opposition to this controlled socialization.

The exercise of this kind of force can be less deliberate too. Take our example of the inequality between men and women in our society. To what extent does the image of women presented in advertising promote an acceptance of this inequality? Though the intention is to sell various products – from lingerie and perfume to household goods, to alcohol, cigarettes, cars and office equipment – the images of women used in advertising are so specific that there are other, less intentional effects, too. Two images dominate. One is of the woman as the domestic at home, using the 'best' products to clean, polish, launder and cook. The other is of the woman as a sexually desirable object, guaranteed to either (1) magically adorn the life of any male who is sensible enough to drink a certain sort of gin, drive a particular car or use a specific shaving lotion; or (2) be transformed into an irresistible seductress when she wears particular underwear or perfume, or is given a particular brand of chocolates.

Such advertising socializes both men *and* women, of course. The outcome is a stereotypical view of womanhood and of the place of women in society, embraced not only by those whom it disadvantages, but also by those who benefit from it. There *is* a consensus about such things. However, it is not the kind of consensus portrayed by the consensus theorist. It is an imposed consensus, preventing the conflict that would break out if people were allowed to see the world as it really is.

Conflict theory: conclusion

There are a number of sociological theories that can be called structural-conflict theories, in that they are based on two main premises:

- social structures consist of unequally advantaged groups; the interests of these groups are in conflict, since inequality results from the domination and exploitation of the disadvantaged groups by the advantaged ones
- social order in such societies is maintained by force – either by actual force, or by force exercised through socialization.

Consensus theory versus conflict theory

Structural-consensus theory and structural-conflict theory emphasize different kinds of influences on thought and behaviour. Though both theories see the origin of human social life in the structural influences or determinants of society external to the individual, they disagree about what this outside society consists of. Consensus theory is based on the primacy of the influence of culture – what we learn to want as a result of socialization. Conflict theory, in contrast, pays most attention to the conflict inherent in the relationship between unequally advantaged groups in society and argues that the content of culture should be seen as a means of perpetuating relationships of inequality.

Society as the creation of its members

The influence of interpretation on behaviour

A third kind of sociological theory leads in a rather different direction. It still attempts to explain why human beings in society behave

in the orderly ways they do. But instead of looking for the answer in the influence of a social structure which people confront and are constrained by, this theory argues something else. From this point of view, the most important influence on an individual's behaviour is the behaviour of other individuals towards him or her. The focus is not on general cultural rules, or on the unequal distribution of advantage in whole societies. It is on the way individual social encounters work – on how the parties to them are able to understand and thereby interact with one another. This is not to say that structural theories do not try to explain this, too. In consensus theory, for example, people are role players, and act out parts learnt through socialization. But how do they decide which roles to play, in which social setting? Consensus theory does not try to explain why people choose one role rather than another. It is assumed that we somehow learn to make the right choices. This third theory, however, argues that the choice of role playing is much more complex than in this rather robotized view. It argues that the essence of social life lies in the quite extraordinary ability of humans to work out what is going on around them – their ability to attach meaning to reality – and then to choose to act in a particular way in the light of this interpretation. This is called **interpretive**, or **action theory**.

Action theory

Action theorists stress the need to concentrate on the *micro*-level of social life, the way particular individuals are able to interact with one another in individual social encounters, rather than on the *macro*-level, the way the whole structure of society influences the behaviour of individuals. They argue that we must not think of societies as structures existing independently of, and prior to, the interaction of individuals. For action theorists, societies are the end result of human interaction, not its cause. Only by looking at how individual humans are able to interact can we come to understand how social order is created. To see how this happens, let us reflect on the kinds of action of which humans are capable.

  Some human action is like the action of phenomena in the inanimate world – purpose*less*, or lacking intention. We all do things involuntarily – like sneezing, blinking or yawning. We do not *choose* to feel fear, excitement, or pain, or choose to react in certain ways to those feelings. So far as we know, the actions of non-human animate phenomena are purely instinctive (automatic or reflex responses to

external stimuli). It is true that animals, for example, often appear to act in a purposive way by using their brains. They seem to choose to eat or sleep or be friendly or aggressive, or to choose to evacuate their bladders over the new living-room carpet. Nevertheless, the usual zoological explanation is that even these often quite sophisticated patterns of animal action are involuntary. They are reactive and conditioned, rather than the product of voluntary creative decision-making.

In contrast, nearly all human action *is* voluntary. It is the product of a conscious decision to act, a result of thought. Nearly everything we do is the result of choosing to act in one way rather than another. Furthermore, this is purposive, or goal-oriented choice. We choose between courses of action because, as humans, we are able to aim at an end or a goal and take action to achieve this. Nearly all human action, therefore, is *intentional* **action**: we *mean* to do what we do in order to achieve our chosen purposes.

Where do these chosen purposes, or goals, come from? What action theory emphasizes is that we decide what to do in the light of our *interpretation* of the world around us. Being human means making sense of the settings or situations in which we find ourselves and choosing to act accordingly. To use the usual action theory phrase for this, we choose what to do in the light of our 'definition of the situation'. For example, suppose you wake up one summer morning to find the sun shining in a cloudless sky. You decide to sunbathe all day and to mow your lawn in the evening, when it will be cooler. At lunchtime, you see large clouds beginning to form in the distance. Because you decide there is a chance of a thunderstorm, you cut the grass immediately. You get very hot. It does not rain. In the evening, you go for a walk in the country. You come to a country pub and stop for a drink. As you sit outside you notice smoke rising on a hillside some distance away. As you watch the smoke gets thicker and darker. You decide the fire is unattended and out of control. You dash inside the pub and ring the fire brigade. Shortly afterwards you hear a fire engine racing to the fire. You climb a nearby hill to have a better look. When you get there you see that the fire is, in fact, deliberate; it is a bonfire in the garden of a house on the hillside which you had been unable to see from the pub. Shortly afterwards you hear the fire engine returning to its base. You go back to the pub to finish your drink. It has been cleared away in your absence. You have no more money. You decide it is not your day. You decide to go home.

Of course, nearly all of the settings we have to make sense of involve more than this because nearly everything we do in our lives

takes place in the company of others. Most of the situations we have to define in order to choose how to act are *social*; they involve other humans doing things. You see a very large man shaking his fist and shouting at you, and conclude that he is not overjoyed that you have driven into the back of his car. As a result you decide not to suggest that he was responsible for the accident because of the way he parked. You see a traffic warden slipping a parking ticket under your wind-screen-wiper, and decide not to contribute to the Police Benevolent Fund after all. This is *social* action. It is action we choose to take in the light of what we interpret the behaviour of others to mean.

Meaningful social interaction

There is more to social action than interpretation leading to action, however. Most of the time when we interact with other humans, they *want* us to arrive at certain interpretations of their actions – they *want* us to think one thing of them rather than another. The man whose car has just been damaged is not behaving in the rather distinctive manner described above because he wishes the culprit to come round to his house for tea. The man scratching his nose in the auction room is not (usually) alleviating an itch. He is communicating his bid to the auctioneer, and he expects that the latter will interpret his actions as he wishes. Pedestrians in London streets do not wave to taxi-drivers because they are, or want to become, their friends. They do so because they want a lift.

Dress can often organize interpretation just as effectively as ges-tures, of course. Though the punk rocker, the skinhead, the bowler-hatted civil servant, the police officer and the traffic warden whom we encounter in the street make no *apparent* attempt to communicate with us, they are certainly doing so, nevertheless. They want us to think certain things about them when we see them, so they choose to communicate by the use of uniforms. They are making a symbolic use of dress, if you like; after all, like gestures, garments symbolize what their users want us to interpret about them.

The most effective symbols humans have at their disposal are words – linguistic symbols. Though dress, gesture, touch and even smell can often communicate our meanings and organize the interpretations of others adequately enough, clearly the most efficient – and most remarkable – way in which we can get others to understand us is through language. This is why action theorists are often interested in the way we use language to exchange meanings with each other. Language, verbal or written, is the uniquely human device which we

are able to use to interact meaningfully with one another, and thereby to create society.

From this point of view, societies are made up of individuals engaging in a countless number of meaningful encounters. The result is social order. But this is no *determined* order. It is not the result of the imposition of cultural rules, as the consensus theorist sees it. Nor is it the result of the constraints of a world where advantages are unequally distributed, and where cultural rules legitimate these constraints, as the conflict theorist sees it. Instead, society is an order created, or accomplished, by the capacities of the members themselves. It is the outcome of innumerable occasions of interaction, each one accomplished by interpreting, meaning-attributing actors who can make sense of the social settings in which they find themselves and who choose courses of action accordingly.

The social construction of reality

There is another important difference between structural and interpretive conceptions of society. For structural theorists, the character of a society – its social structure – is not in doubt. It is a 'real' thing that exists outside of its members. For the interpretivist, however, it is much more difficult to describe a society that is the outcome of interpretation as somehow 'true' or 'real' in this structural sense.

For the interpretivist, being human involves interpreting what is going on around one – saying: 'This is what is happening here', and choosing an appropriate course of action in the light of this interpretation. However, such interpretations of 'what is going on here' can only ever be considered 'correct' or 'true' for the particular person doing the interpreting. What is 'really' going on depends on how the individual sees it. Reality is in the eye of the beholder. We act in ways we consider appropriate. What we consider appropriate depends upon what we think the behaviour of others means. It is therefore by no means inconceivable that other people, in exactly the same social situations as ourselves, would have taken the behaviour around them to mean something very different, and would therefore have taken very different courses of action from us.

For example, a car crashes into a wall on a wet winter's evening. The police officer called to the scene discovers a dead driver and a strong smell of drink in the car. A search reveals an empty whisky bottle underneath a seat. Like all humans encountering a social situation, the officer engages in a process of interpretation, defining the situation. Weighing up the evidence, he or she decides

that the crash was an accident caused by the driver being drunk and losing control of the vehicle in difficult driving conditions. Another officer called to the scene might use this evidence to interpret things rather differently, however. He or she might consider the possibility that the driver deliberately drove the car into the wall as an act of suicide, having first given himself courage to do so by drinking the whisky. The second officer would then make inquiries that the first would not. The dead man's domestic and work affairs would be looked into and it might be discovered that he had become severely depressed about his future. The officer would decide that his suspicions of suicide had been sufficiently confirmed by this additional evidence, and that it should be given at the Coroner's court when the inquest was held.

How the death is finally interpreted depends upon the decision of the court, of course, when the evidence is reassessed by a new set of interpreters – particularly the Coroner. The Coroner's decision will define the death as either accidental or a suicide. But is this judgment the 'truth'? Who is to say what the 'reality' of the situation was? What 'really' happened here? In the case of this kind of example, of course, no one will ever know for certain.

Even in more conclusive circumstances, actions still always depend upon the interpretation of the beholder. Suppose you come across a middle-aged man grappling with a young girl in the bushes of a park. What you do depends on what you think is going on. You may decide the man is assaulting the girl, and take a course of action you see fit in the light of this interpretation (and depending how brave you feel at the time). Or you may decide it is horseplay between lovers, or a father admonishing his daughter – or any other interpretation that may spring to mind. What matters is not so much that you are right, that you see what is *really* happening, but that:

- you cannot help but come to some sort of interpretation or other (even if it is that you do *not* know what is happening); and
- what you decide to do will be the result of this interpretation.

Though subsequent events may 'prove' things one way or another, initial action undertaken by human beings in such social circumstances, though always involving a process of interpretation, can never be assumed to be definitely 'true' or 'real'. It can only ever be how we choose to see things. The world 'is' what we think it is. As W. I. Thomas (1966) puts it: 'If man defines situations as real, they are real in their consequences.'

Action theory: conclusion

In contrast to the structuralist view then, social 'reality' is not a factual, objective, unambiguous state of affairs. Reality can only ever be what the actors involved in interaction *think* is real, and what they *think* is real determines what they decide to do. Reality is therefore quite definitely the negotiated creation of individuals in interaction with one another. Furthermore, because the social worlds so created are dependent on the interpretations of particular individuals in particular social settings, they are much more precarious constructions than suggested by the notion of social structures determining behaviour.

Consensus, conflict and action theories thus identify different factors as significant in explaining the nature of social life, and of the relationship between the individual and society. We will look in detail at the work of some of the most significant sociologists of the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As we shall see, for most of the time sociology has been in existence as a distinct discipline, the kinds of issues highlighted by consensus, conflict and action approaches have been central to sociological theorizing. Although only some of this theorizing falls neatly or exclusively within one of these traditions alone, they are nonetheless useful as reference points from which to understand differences and debates in sociological thought.

Classical sociological theorizing: analysing modernity

The work of three nineteenth-century sociologists in particular has reverberated through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and it is for this reason that they are regarded as the classic figures in the discipline. They are a Frenchman, **Emile Durkheim** (1858–1917), and two Germans, **Karl Marx** (1818–1883) and **Max Weber** (1864–1920). Despite the great differences in the content and direction of their sociological theories, the work of Durkheim, Marx and Weber each represents an intellectual and political response to the same historical circumstances. The most powerful set of forces at work in nineteenth-century Europe was unleashed in the eighteenth century during the period historians call the **Enlightenment**; today these forces are summarized in sociology as **modernity**. Sociology came into being because of modernity, and the theories of many of its major figures in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be seen as different

kinds of responses to the birth of the modern world. This is particularly true of the classic writings of Durkheim, Marx and Weber.

As we shall see later (chapter 9), there are those today who believe that over the last few decades a new set of social changes has once again transformed the world. According to *postmodernists*, the circumstances in which we live now and the ways in which we think – particularly the ways in which we think about ourselves – are so completely different from those described by the theorists of modernity such as Durkheim, Marx and Weber that we should realize that the world of modernity has been superseded by a new world, of *postmodernity*. However, as chapter 9 will show, the many critics of postmodernism hotly dispute this depiction of contemporary life. Indeed, the debate between modernist theorists and postmodernists has been one of the principal features of recent social theorizing. But we must leave an examination of the ideas of postmodernism and the competing ones of its critics until the end of this book. At this early stage in our journey we need to examine the profound changes to human existence ushered in by the emergence of modern life that gave birth to the discipline of sociology.

Modernity

The idea of the 'modern' originated as an account of the kinds of institutions, ideas and behaviour that grew out of the decline of medieval society in Europe. Although the seeds of modernity had been sown hundreds of years before, it was not until the nineteenth century that modern life became securely established. The changes involved were so momentous that Karl Polanyi (1973) does not overstate the case when he uses the phrase *The Great Transformation* to describe them. Marx and Engels are even more graphic in their famous depiction of modernity:

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face . . . the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men. (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848)

In very summary form, the changes wrought by modernity involved the emergence and establishment of:

- capitalism
- mass production based on the factory
- a hugely increased, and largely urbanized, population
- the nation-state as the modern form of government
- Western domination of the globe
- secular forms of knowledge, particularly science.

Capitalism

In pre-capitalist economies, though there is some manufacturing and some trade, people more usually produce goods for their own consumption. This is particularly true of pre-capitalist agriculture. Capitalism means something very different. Capitalists employ workers to produce their goods for them, in return for a wage. The point of producing these goods is to sell them in the marketplace for more than the costs involved in their production. That is, capitalist production is about the pursuit of profit. The more efficient the production, the more profitable it can be. In the systematic pursuit of profit, what matters most is the market value of a good, the availability of markets, and the efficiency with which an enterprise is organized. In particular, this involves the rational management of the labour force so that costs are kept down.

Capitalism thus involves the establishment of new ways of thinking and acting, largely absent in the pre-modern world. Workers have to sell their labour to employers as a commodity in a labour market. Their survival depends not on what they produce for themselves but on the wages they receive, with which they have to purchase the goods and services they need. As a result, their life-chances are crucially determined by the rewards they receive for the work they do. That is, a system of class inequality emerges, largely based on occupational rewards. In addition, identity becomes intimately linked to work and class membership; how you see yourself and how you are seen by others becomes defined by the work you do and the rewards this work brings. One of the social expressions of this aspect of modernity is the emergence of a labour movement: organizations, such as Trade Unions, become established to represent the collectively held interests of workers in similar occupational groupings. Gender inequality develops too. Not only do male workers tend to receive greater rewards than working women but, over time, and as the mechanization of production increases, women become progressively excluded from the workplace. This produces a separation of life and life-chances into, on

the one hand, a male-dominated public sphere, of the world of work and wages, and on the other, a female-dominated private sphere, of the world of unwaged domestic labour. Women thus become economically dependent on their husbands and defined principally in terms of their role in managing the domestic world.

Agricultural production and trade became capitalized first and then, in the nineteenth century, capitalism became the dynamic behind the huge and rapid growth in industrial production.

Techniques of production

Alongside the emergence of capitalism, the so-called Industrial Revolution allowed new ways of working and producing goods to be instituted. Rapid technological advances led to large-scale manufacturing being located in a designated workplace – the factory – and the organization of production became the object of rational calculation. The factory system involved the workers being systematically organized and controlled, with the separation of the process of production into specialized tasks a distinctive feature of this regulation. Later on, and with further technological advances, modern mass production techniques became ever more sophisticated, culminating in what is known as Fordism – the rational and efficient organization of manufacturing. (The name is derived from the founder of the assembly line in motor manufacturing, Henry Ford.) Fordism involves not only the mass production of a standardized product (Ford is famously remembered for saying that his customers could have any colour Model T Ford that they liked so long as it was black), but rigidly bureaucratic organizational structures, the pursuit of high productivity and collective wage bargaining.

Population change

The Great Transformation included an unprecedented growth in population and its concentration in urban settings. Birth rates rose and death rates fell; according to Kumar (1978), the population of Europe grew from around 120 million in 1750 to around 468 million in 1913. The urbanization of the population was another major feature of modernity; there was mass migration from the countryside to the towns and cities that were springing up around the centres of industrial production. This provided the template for a typical feature of modern twentieth-century life – the urban conurbation.

The nation-state

Modernity saw a new form of polity – the nation-state – come into being. States have a centralized form of government whose absolute power extends over a national territory. Governmental decrees – laws – are passed which apply to all those living on this territory and the state's ultimate power resides in its monopoly over the use of force, for example, by means of its control of the armed forces. The emergence of state government spawns a civil authority too – a system of political administrators and officials whose task it is to enforce state-sponsored decisions across the national territory. By the twentieth century, global political power resided in the nation-states of the West and ideas of citizenship, nationalism, democracy, socialism, conservatism and liberalism dominated political thinking and discourse.

Global domination by the West

The establishment of the power of the nation-state triggered the political, economic and cultural domination of the globe by European states. The rapid economic development of the West in the nineteenth century depended crucially on easy access to raw materials from around the globe. The political and military power of these states enabled them to plunder the material and human resources of weaker global areas and began the process of the unequal development of the First and Third Worlds with which we live today. Later on, this Western domination was cemented politically and culturally by colonialism and economically by the control of global markets.

Cultural change: the rise of rationality and the secularization of knowledge

The Enlightenment provided the cultural shift necessary for the final triumph of modernity. An historical moment of the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment refers to the emergence of a new confidence in the power of human reason. Knowledge production before the Enlightenment typically involved experts translating religious texts or signs. In this way it became possible for people to know what their God or gods had in mind for them. In complete contrast, the Enlightenment promoted the essentially secular view that by using reason, by thinking rationally, humans could, for the first time in human history, produce certain knowledge and could therefore harness this

knowledge in the pursuit of progress. The exemplar of rationality was scientific thinking and scientific activity. The intellectual engine of modernity was thus the belief that nothing could remain a mystery, nothing would remain undiscovered, if reason were made the guide. Moreover, this would allow humankind to not only know things for certain but to know how to make things better – to achieve progress. The pre-modern dependence on the virtues of tradition and continuity gave way to a commitment to the benefits of reason-inspired change, innovation and progress. This way of thinking is called **modernism**. It is the rise of modernism, a cultural change in belief about what constitutes knowledge and what knowledge is for, that directly promoted the rise of sociology and sociological theorizing.

Modernism and sociology

Modernist thinking involves the idea that the purpose of acquiring knowledge is, as Giddens (1987) puts it: 'To influence for the better the human condition.' Modernity implies the constant pursuit of improvement in human lives and of the pursuit of progress. Unlike traditional settings, where virtue lies in things remaining the same, in modern worlds change, development and improvement are the goals. As Cheal (1991) has pointed out, believing in the ideal and possibility of progress means: 'believing that things tomorrow can always be better than they are today, which in turn means being prepared to overturn the existing order of things in order to make way for progress. It means, in other words, being prepared to break with tradition' (p. 27).

How should this progress be achieved? Underpinning the belief in the possibility of progress is a belief in the power of reason – in the ability of humans to think about themselves, their condition and their society reflexively and rationally – and to improve it in the light of such rational thought. The idea that humans can not only think about, and explain, their lives – to produce *social theories* in fact – but can employ them to change society for the better, is a specifically modern notion. The idea that reason can provide an agenda and a set of prescriptions for living, rather than relying on divine intervention and instruction, only began to prevail after the Enlightenment. Summarizing the effects of the Enlightenment, Badham (1986) says:

> It was during this period that faith in divine revelation, and the authority of the Church as interpreter of God's will, were increasingly undermined by this new confidence in the ability of human reason to provide an

> understanding of the world and a guide for human conduct. Similarly, the understanding of history as the chronicle of the fall of man from God's grace, with spiritual salvation only attainable in the next world, was largely replaced by a belief in human perfectibility and the increasing faith in man's power and ability to use his new-found knowledge to improve mankind's state. The importance of these two assumptions should not be underestimated. Without the faith in reason, social theory could not be regarded as playing any important role in society. Without the belief in the possibility of progress, whatever reason's ability to understand the nature of society, social theory would not be able to fulfil any positive role in improving upon man's fate. (1986, p. 11)

So sociology is not only a product of modernity – of a belief in the power of human reason to create knowledge which can be used to achieve progress. In addition, the world created by modernity is its principal subject matter: Giddens (1987, pp. vii–viii) has said that in sociology, the 'prime field of study is the social world brought about by the advent of modernity'.

As Giddens (1987, p. 26) also puts it, the very existence of sociology is 'bound up with the "project of modernity"'. The construction of social theories thus reflects a concern not only with *how* we live, but how we *should* live; social theories of modern society try not only to describe and explain our social world, but to diagnose its problems and propose solutions. According to Giddens (1987, p. 17), this places sociology in the 'tensed zone of transition between diagnosis and prognosis'.

The problem, of course, concerns the goal and direction of desirable change. The following chapters attempt to summarize the contributions of some influential nineteenth-, twentieth- and twenty-first-century sociological figures to this enterprise – the contribution of sociology to the **'project of modernity'**.

Further Reading

There are five different kinds of texts included in the Further Reading sections at the end of each chapter of this book. These are:

- the classic texts in social theory
- readers consisting of extracts of classic work by the major theorists
- texts analysing the work of one or more of the major theorists
- readers consisting of commissioned chapters by experts on specific theorists and/or particular areas of social theory
- introductory theory textbooks covering similar ground to this one.

What you use as further reading and how you use these books depends on the stage you have reached in your studies. A-level students will get most benefit from the theory textbooks as will undergraduates in other subjects taking sociology modules. First-year undergraduates reading sociology should try and go beyond a reliance on such texts and also use at least the famous extracts contained in the readers. Second- and third-year undergraduates should consult the original texts themselves as well as the books dedicated to particular theorists and the commentaries contained in the commissioned readers.

Textbooks

Some of these are a lot more difficult than others. Decide for yourself which ones you find most accessible and helpful. In no particular order, I suggest you look at:

Bauman, Zygmunt and May, Tim: *Thinking Sociologically*, 2nd edn, Blackwell, 2001.

Baert, Patrick: *Social Theory in the Twentieth Century*, Polity, 1998.

Bernstein, R. J.: *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory*, Blackwell, 1976.

Bilton, Tony et al.: *Introductory Sociology*, 4th edn, chapters 17, 18, 19 Palgrave, 2002.

Craib, Ian: *Modern Social Theory*, 2nd edn, Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1992.

Craib, Ian: *Classical Social Theory*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

Cuff, E. C., Francis, D. W., Sharrock, W. W.: *Perspectives in Sociology*, 4th edn, Routledge, 1998.

Dodd, Nigel: *Social Theory and Modernity*, Polity, 1999.

Fidelman, Ashe: *Contemporary Social and Political Theory: an introduction*, Open University Press, 1998.

Lee, David and Newby, Howard: *The Problem of Sociology*, Hutchinson, 1983.

May, Tim: *Situating Social Theory*, Open University Press, 1996.

Ritzer, George: *Sociological Theory*, 5th edn, McGraw-Hill, 2000.

Seidmore, Steven: *Contested Knowledge*: *social theory in the postmodern era*, Blackwell, 1998.

Skidmore, W.: *Theoretical Thinking in Sociology*, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Readers including extracts from the classic works

Craig Calhoun et al.: *Classical Sociological Theory*, Blackwell's Readers in Sociology, Blackwell, 2002a.

Craig Calhoun et al.: *Contemporary Sociological Theory*, Blackwell's Readers in Sociology, Blackwell, 2002b.

James Farganis (ed.): *Readings in Social Theory: the classic tradition to post-modernism*, 3rd edn, McGraw-Hill, 2000.

Charles Lemert (ed.): *Social Theory: the Multicultural and Classic Readings*, Westview Press, 1993.

Commissioned readers on theories and theorists

Robert Bocock and Kenneth Thompson (eds): *Social and Cultural Forms of Modernity*, Polity, 1992.

Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (eds): *Modernity and its Futures*, Polity, 1992.

George Ritzer (ed.): *The Blackwell Companion to Major Social Theorists*, Blackwell, 2002.

Bryan Turner (ed.): *The Blackwell Companion to Social Theory*, 2nd edn, Blackwell, 2000.