PART III

Recent Integrative Developments in Sociological Theory

CHAPTER 14

Micro-Macro and Agency-Structure Integration

Chapter Outline

Micro-Macro Integration

Agency-Structure Integration

Agency-Structure and Micro-Macro Linkages: Fundamental Differences

In this chapter we deal with two important developments in recent sociological theory. Our first concern is a dramatic development that occurred largely in the United States in the 1980s (although, as we will see, it had important precursors) and continues to this day. That development is the growth of interest in the issue of the *micro-macro linkage* (Barnes, 2001; J. Turner, 2007b; Turner and Boyns, 2001). Then we will deal with a parallel development that occurred largely in European sociological theory—the rise in interest in the *relationship between agency and structure.* As we will see, there are important similarities *and* crucial differences between the American micro-macro literature and the European work on agency and structure. The micro-macro and agency-structure literatures themselves can be seen as synthetic developments and thus as parts of the broad movement toward theoretical synthesis discussed throughout Part Two of this book.

Micro-Macro Integration

Micro-Macro Extremism

Until recently, *one* of the major divisions in contemporary American sociological theory was the conflict between extreme *microscopic* and *macroscopic*[1] theories (and theorists) and, perhaps more important, between those who have *interpreted* sociological theories in these ways (Archer, 1982). Such extreme theories and interpretations of theories have tended to heighten the image of a great chasm between micro and macro theories and, more generally, the image of conflict and disorder (Gouldner, 1970; Wardell and Turner, 1986; Wiley, 1985) in sociological theory.

Although it is possible to interpret (and many have) the classic sociological theorists discussed in Part One of this book (Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel) as either micro or macro extremists, the most defensible perspective, or at least the one that will orient this chapter, is that they were most generally concerned with the micro-macro linkage (Moscovici, 1993). Marx can be seen as being interested in the coercive and alienating effect of capitalist society on individual workers (and capitalists). Weber may be viewed as being focally concerned with the plight of the individual within the iron cage of a formally rational society. Simmel was interested primarily in the relationship between objective (macro) culture and subjective (or individual, micro) culture. Even Durkheim was concerned with the effect of macro-level social facts on individuals and individual behavior (for example, suicide). If we accept these characterizations of the classic sociological theorists, it appears that much of the last century of American sociological theory has involved a loss of concern for this linkage and the dominance of micro and macro extremists—that is, the preeminence of theorists and theories that accord overwhelming power and significance to either the micro or the macro level. Thus, the theories discussed in Part Two of this book tended toward micro or macro extremism. On the macro-extreme side were structural functionalism, conflict theory, and some varieties of neo-Marxian theory (especially economic determinism). On the micro-extreme end were symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology, exchange, and rational choice theory.

Among the most notable of the twentieth-century macro-extreme theories are Parsons's (1966) "cultural determinism"[2]; Dahrendorf's (1959) conflict theory, with its focus on imperatively coordinated associations; and Peter Blau's macrostructuralism, epitomized by his proud announcement, "I am a structural determinist" (1977:x). Macrostructural extremism comes from other sources as well (Rubinstein, 1986), including network theorists such as White, Boorman, and Breiger (1976), ecologists such as Duncan and Schnore (1959), and structuralists such as Mayhew (1980). Few take a more extreme position than Mayhew, who says such things as, "In structural sociology the unit of analysis is always the social network, *never the individual*" (1980:349).

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[1] Although the use of the terms *micro* and *macro* might suggest that we are dealing with a dichotomy, always keep in mind that there is a *continuum* ranging from the micro end to the macro end (see the Appendix).

[2] Even as sympathetic an observer as Jeffrey Alexander (1987a:296) admits Parsons's "own collectivist bias"; see also Coleman (1986:1310). However, although Parsons's greatest influence was in collectivistic theory, it is also possible to find within his work a strong micro-macro integrative theory.

On the micro-extreme side we can point to a good portion of symbolic interactionism and the work of Blumer (1969a), who often seemed to have structural functionalism in mind as he positioned symbolic interactionism as a sociological theory seemingly single-mindedly concerned with micro-level phenomena (see Chapter 10 for a very different interpretation of Blumer's perspective). An even clearer case of micro extremism is exchange theory and George Homans (1974), who sought an alternative to structural functionalism and found it in the extreme micro orientation of Skinnerian behaviorism. Then there is ethnomethodology and its concern for the everyday practices of actors. Garfinkel (1967) was put off by the macro foci of structural functionalism and its tendency to turn actors into "judgmental dopes." Scheff (2007) makes a more general case for "microsociology."

The Movement toward Micro-Macro Integration

Although micro-macro extremism characterized much of twentieth-century sociological theory, it became possible, beginning mainly in the 1980s, to discern a movement, largely in American sociology, away from micro-macro extremism and toward a broad consensus that *the* focus, instead, should be on *the integration (or synthesis, linkage) of micro and macro theories and/or levels of social analysis.* This approach represents quite a change from that of the 1970s, when Kemeny argued: "So little attention is given to this distinction that the terms 'micro' and 'macro' are not commonly even indexed in sociological works" (1976:731). It could be argued that at least in this sense American sociological theorists have rediscovered the theoretical project of the early masters.

While developments in the 1980s and 1990s were particularly dramatic, isolated earlier works directly addressed the micro-macro linkage. For example, in the mid-1960s Helmut Wagner (1964) dealt with the relationship between small-scale and large-scale theories. At the end of the decade Walter Wallace (1969) examined the micro-macro continuum, but it occupied a secondary role in his analysis and was included as merely one of the "complications" of his basic taxonomy of sociological theory. In the mid-1970s Kemeny (1976) called for greater attention to the micro-macro distinction as well as to the ways in which micro and macro relate to each other.

However, it was in the 1980s that we witnessed a flowering of work on the micro-macro linkage issue. Randall Collins argued that work on this topic "promises to be a significant area of theoretical advance for some time to come" (1986a:1350). In their introduction to a two-volume set of books, one devoted to macro theory (Eisenstadt and Helle, 1985a) and the other to micro theory (Helle and Eisenstadt, 1985), Eisenstadt and Helle concluded that "the confrontation between micro- and macro-theory belong[s] to the past" (1985b:3). Similarly, Münch and Smelser, in their conclusion to the anthology *The Micro-Macro Link* (Alexander et al., 1987), asserted: "Those who have argued polemically that one level is more fundamental than the other . . . must be regarded as in error. Virtually every contributor to this volume has correctly insisted on the mutual interrelations between micro and macro levels" (1987:385).

There are two major strands of work on micro-macro integration. Some theorists focus on integrating micro and macro *theories,* whereas others are concerned with developing a theory that deals with the linkage between micro and macro *levels* (Alford and Friedland, 1985; Edel, 1959) of social analysis. Above, for example, I quoted

Eisenstadt and Helle (1985b:3), who concluded that the confrontation between micro and macro *theories* was behind us, while Münch and Smelser (1987:385) came to a similar conclusion about the need to choose between emphasizing micro or macro *levels.* There are important differences between trying to integrate macro (for example, structural functionalism) and micro (for example, symbolic interactionism) theories and attempting to develop a theory that can deal with the relationship between macro (for example, social-structure) and micro (for example, personality) levels of social analysis (for an example of the latter, see Summers-Effler, 2002).[3]

Given this general introduction, we turn now to some examples of micro-macro integration. At a number of places throughout Part Two of this book, we dealt with efforts to integrate micro and macro *theories.* All the examples that follow focus on integrating micro and macro *levels of social analysis.*

Examples of Micro-Macro Integration

Integrated Sociological Paradigm

This section begins with my (Ritzer, 1979, 1981a) effort at micro-macro integration. The discussion here will be relatively brief, because the integrated sociological paradigm also is discussed in the Appendix. It is summarized there because it represents the metatheoretical schema that serves to orient and organize this book. In this section the focus is on what the integrated paradigm has to say about the issue of micro-macro linkage.

It should be noted that my thinking on the integrated paradigm in general, and more specifically on micro-macro linkage, was shaped by the work of a number of predecessors, especially that of Abraham Edel (1959) and Georges Gurvitch (1964; see also Bosserman, 1968). Gurvitch operates with the belief that the social world can be studied in terms of five "horizontal," or micro-macro, levels (Smelser [1997] identifies four), presented in ascending order from micro to macro: forms of sociality, groupings, social class, social structure, and global structures. To complement this hierarchy, Gurvitch also offers ten "vertical," or "depth," levels, beginning with the most objective social phenomena (for example, ecological factors, organizations) and ending with the most subjective social phenomena (collective ideas and values, the collective mind). Gurvitch crosscuts his horizontal and vertical dimensions in order to produce numerous levels of social analysis.

My work on the integrated sociological paradigm was motivated, in part, by the need to build upon Gurvitch's insights but to produce a more parsimonious model. It begins with the micro-macro continuum (Gurvitch's horizontal levels), ranging from individual thought and action to world-systems (see the Appendix, Figure A.1). To this continuum is added an objective-subjective continuum (Gurvitch's vertical levels), ranging from material phenomena such as individual action and bureaucratic structures to nonmaterial phenomena such as consciousness and norms and values (see the Appendix, Figure A.2). Like Gurvitch, I crosscut these two continua, but in this case the result is a far more manageable four, rather than many, levels of social analysis. Figure 14.1 depicts my major levels of social analysis.

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[3] As well as with meso-level phenomena (Ulmer, 2007).

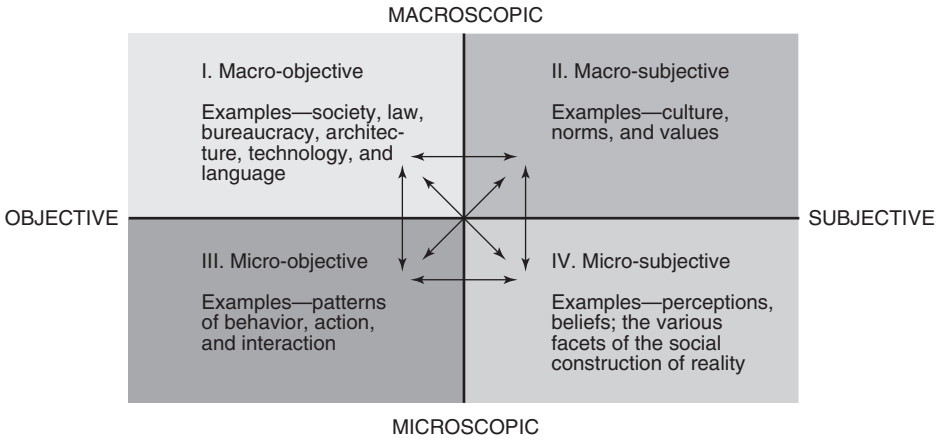

FIGURE 14.1 ***Ritzer's Major Levels of Social Analysis***
Note that this is a "snapshot" in time. It is embedded in an ongoing historical process.

In terms of the micro-macro issue, my view is that it cannot be dealt with apart from the objective-subjective continuum. All micro and macro social phenomena are also either objective or subjective. Thus, the conclusion is that there are four major levels of social analysis and that sociologists must focus on the dialectical interrelationship among these levels. The macro-objective level involves large-scale material realities such as society, bureaucracy, and technology. The macro-subjective level encompasses large-scale nonmaterial phenomena such as norms and values. At the micro levels, micro objectivity involves small-scale objective entities such as patterns of action and interaction, whereas micro subjectivity is concerned with the small-scale mental processes by which people construct social reality. Each of these four levels is important in itself, but of utmost importance is the dialectical relationship among and between them.

I have employed an integrative micro-macro approach in *Expressing America: A Critique of the Global Credit Card Society* (1995; see also R. Manning, 2000). Specifically, I used C. Wright Mills's (1959) ideas on the relationship between micro-level *personal troubles* and macro-level *public issues* to analyze the problems created by credit cards.

Personal troubles are those problems that affect an individual and those people immediately around him or her. For example, a husband who batters his spouse is creating problems for his wife, for other members of the family, and perhaps for himself (especially if the law is involved). However, the actions of a single husband who batters his wife are not going to create a public issue—those actions will not result in a public outcry to abandon marriage as a social institution. Public issues tend to be those that affect large numbers of people, perhaps society as a whole. The disintegration of marriage as an institution, in part as a result of widespread spouse battering, would be a public issue. There are various relationships between personal

troubles and public issues. For example, widespread personal troubles can become a public issue, and a public issue can cause many personal troubles.

I examine a wide range of personal troubles and public issues associated with credit cards. This argument, and an integrated approach to the micro-macro linkage, can be illustrated by following this discussion of the issue of consumer debt. At the macro level, aggregate consumer debt has become a public issue because a large and growing number of people are increasingly indebted to credit card companies. A by-product of this growing consumer debt is an increase in delinquencies and bankruptcies. Also at the macro level, and a public issue, is the role played by the government in encouraging consumer debt through its tendency to accumulate debt. More important is the role played by the credit card firms in encouraging people to go into debt by doing everything they can to get as many credit cards into as many hands as possible. There is, for example, the increasing tendency for people to receive notices in the mail that they are eligible for preapproved credit cards. People can easily acquire a large number of credit cards with a huge collective credit limit. Perhaps the most reprehensible activities of the credit card firms involve their efforts to get cards into the hands of college and high school students. They are endeavoring to "hook" young people on a life of credit and indebtedness. Such activities are clearly a public issue and are causing personal troubles for untold numbers of people.

Millions of people have gotten themselves into debt, sometimes irretrievably, as a result of the abuse of credit cards. People build up huge balances, sometimes surviving by taking cash advances on one card to make minimum payments on other cards. Overwhelmed, many people become delinquent and sometimes are forced to declare bankruptcy. As a result, some people spend years, in some cases the rest of their lives, trying to pay off old debts and restore their ability to get credit. Even if it does not go this far, many people are working long hours just to pay the interest on their credit card debt and are able to make only a small, if any, dent in their credit balances. Thus, one could say they are indentured for life to the credit card companies.

The kinds of personal troubles described here, when aggregated, create public issues for society. And as we saw previously, public issues such as the policies and procedures of the credit card firms (for example, offering preapproved cards and recruiting students) help create personal troubles. Thus, there is a dialectical relationship between personal troubles and public issues, with each exacerbating the other. More generally, this example of credit cards illustrates the applicability of an integrated micro-macro approach to a pressing social problem.

Multidimensional Sociology

Jeffrey Alexander has offered what he calls a "new 'theoretical logic' for sociology" (1982:xv). That new logic affects "sociological thought at every level of the intellectual continuum" (Alexander, 1982:65). In this spirit, Alexander offers what he terms a *multidimensional sociology.* Although *multidimensionality* has several meanings in his work, the most relevant here is Alexander's multidimensional sense of levels of social analysis.

We can begin with what Alexander (following Parsons) terms the *problem of order.* Alexander suggests that the micro-macro continuum ("an 'individual' or

'collective' level of analysis" [1982:93]) is involved in the way order is created in society. At the macro end of the continuum, order is externally created and is collectivist in nature; that is, order is produced by collective phenomena. At the micro end, order is derived from internalized forces and is individualistic in nature; that is, order stems from individual negotiation.

To the problem of order is added, in a classic Parsonsian position, the *problem of action.* Action involves a materialist-idealist continuum that parallels the objective-subjective continuum employed in my integrated sociological paradigm. At the material end, action is described as instrumental, rational, and conditional. At the nonmaterial pole, action is normative, nonrational, and affective. When we crosscut Alexander's order and action continua, we come up with four levels of social analysis that strongly resemble the four levels that I employ (see Figure 14.2).

Although the terminology is slightly different, there are few if any differences between the models offered by Alexander and me. The major difference lies in the way they relate the four levels. Whereas I want to focus on the dialectical relationship among all four levels, Alexander seeks to grant priority to one of the levels.

Alexander believes that according privilege to the micro levels is "a theoretical mistake" (1987a:295). He is highly critical of all theories, such as symbolic interactionism, that begin at the individual-normative level with nonrational voluntary agency and build toward the macro levels. From his point of view, the problem with these theories is that while maintaining notions of individual freedom and voluntarism, they are unable to deal with the unique (*sui generis*) character of collective phenomena. Alexander is also critical of theories, such as exchange theory, that start at the individual-instrumental level and move toward macro-level structures such as the economy. Such theories are also unable to handle macro-level phenomena adequately. Thus, Alexander is critical of all theories that have their origins at the micro levels and seek to explain macro-level phenomena from that base.

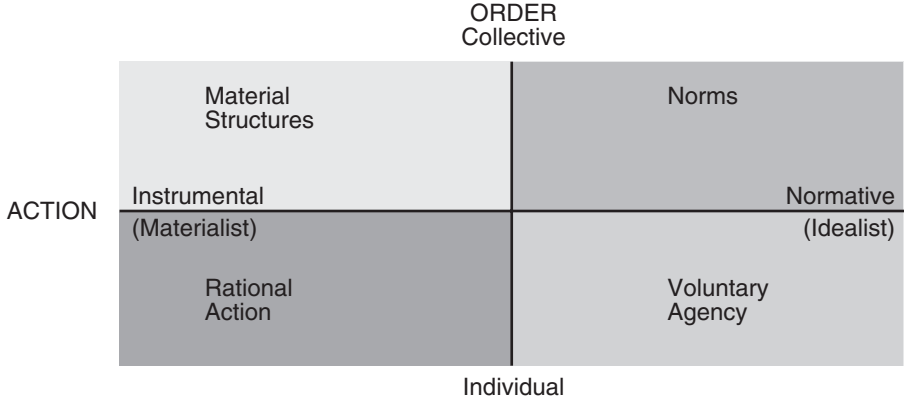

FIGURE 14.2 ***Alexander's Integrative Model***

At the macro level, Alexander is critical of collective-instrumental theories (for example, economic and structural determinism) that emphasize coercive order and eliminate individual freedom. Basically, the problem is that such theories do not allow for individual agency.

Although he expressed an interest in focusing on the relationships among all four of his levels, Alexander's sympathies (not surprisingly, given his Parsonsian and structural-functionalist roots) lay with the collective-normative level and theories that begin at that level. As he put it, "The hope for combining collective order and individual voluntarism lies with the normative, rather than the rationalist tradition" (Alexander, 1982:108). Central to this belief is his view that such an orientation is preferable because the sources of order are internalized (in the conscience) rather than externalized, as is the case with the collective-instrumental orientation. This focus on the internalization of norms allows for *both* order and voluntary agency.

Overall, Alexander argues that any individual, or micro, perspective is to be rejected because it ends with "randomness and complete unpredictability" rather than order (1985a:27). Thus, "the general framework for social theory can be derived *only* from a collectivist perspective" (1985a:28; italics added). And between the two collectivist perspectives, Alexander subscribes to the collective-normative position.

Thus, to Alexander social theorists must choose either a collectivist (macro) or an individualist (micro) perspective. If they choose a collectivist position, they can incorporate only a "relatively small" element of individual negotiation. If, however, they choose an individualist theory, they are doomed to the "individualist dilemma" of trying to sneak into theory supraindividual phenomena to deal with the randomness inherent in their theory. This dilemma can be resolved only "if the formal adherence to individualism is abandoned" (Alexander, 1985a:27).

Thus, although Alexander employs four levels of analysis that closely resemble those utilized by me, there is an important difference in the two models. Alexander accords priority to collective-normative theories and to a focus on norms in social life. I refuse to accord priority to any level and argue for the need to examine the dialectical relationship among and between all four levels. Alexander ends up giving inordinate significance to macro (subjective) phenomena, and as a result, his contribution to the development of a theory of micro-macro integration is highly limited. In a later work, Alexander said, "I believe theorists falsely generalize from a single variable to the immediate reconstruction of the whole" (1987a:314). It can be argued that Alexander is one of these theorists because he seeks to falsely generalize from the collective-normative level to the rest of the social world.

While not directly addressing Alexander's work, Giddens (1984) came to the similar conclusion that *all* work derived from the Parsonsian distinction between action and order inevitably ends up weak at the micro levels, especially on "the knowledgeability of social actors, as constitutive in part of social practices. I [Giddens] do not think that any standpoint which is heavily indebted to Parsons can cope satisfactorily with this issue at the very core of social theory" (1984:xxxvii).

However, it should be noted that Alexander has articulated a more truly integrative perspective, one that defines *micro* and *macro* in terms of each other. Here is the way he expresses this perspective: "The collective environments of action simultaneously

inspire and confine it. If I have conceptualized action correctly, these environments will be seen as its products; if I can conceptualize the environments correctly, action will be seen as their end result" (Alexander, 1987a:303). It appears that Alexander has a more complex, dialectical sense of the micro-macro nexus, one that is more similar to my integrated sociological paradigm than his earlier model.

The Micro Foundations of Macrosociology

In an essay entitled "On the Microfoundations of Macrosociology," Randall Collins (1981a; see also 1981b) has offered a highly reductionistic orientation toward the micro-macro link question (for a critique, see Ritzer, 1985). In fact, despite the inherently integrative title of his essay, Collins labels his approach "radical microsociology." Collins's focus, the focus of radical microsociology, is what he calls "interaction ritual chains," or bundles of "individual chains of interactional experience, crisscrossing each other in space as they flow along in time" (1981a:998). In focusing on interaction ritual chains, Collins seeks to avoid what he considers to be even more reductionistic concerns with individual behavior and consciousness. Collins raises the level of analysis to interaction, chains of interaction, and the "marketplace" for such interaction. Collins thus rejects the extreme micro levels of thought and action (behavior) and is critical of the theories (such as phenomenology and exchange theory) that focus on these levels.

Collins also seeks to distance himself from macro theories and their concerns with macro-level phenomena. For example, he is critical of structural functionalists and their concern with macro-objective (structure) and macro-subjective (norms) phenomena. In fact, he goes so far as to say that "the terminology of norms ought to be dropped from sociological theory" (Collins, 1981a:991). He has a similarly negative attitude toward concepts associated with conflict theory, arguing, for example, that there are no "inherent objective" entities such as property and authority; there are only "varying senses that people feel at particular places and times of how strong these enforcing coalitions are" (Collins, 1981a:997). His point is that only people do anything; structures, organizations, classes, and societies "never *do* anything. Any causal explanation must ultimately come down to the actions of real individuals" (Collins, 1975:12).

Collins seeks to show how "all macrophenomena" can be translated "into combinations of micro events" (1981a:985). Specifically, he argues that social structures may be translated empirically into "patterns of repetitive micro interaction" (Collins, 1981a:985). Thus, in the end, Collins seeks *not* an integrated approach but the predominance of micro theory and micro-level phenomena (for a similar critique, see Giddens, 1984). As Collins puts it, "The effort coherently to reconstitute macro sociology upon radically empirical micro foundations is the crucial step toward a more successful sociological science" (1981b:82).

We can contrast Collins's orientation to that of Karin Knorr-Cetina (1981). Although she, too, accords great importance to the interactional domain, Knorr-Cetina grants a greater role to both consciousness and macro-level phenomena in her work. Although Knorr-Cetina, like Collins, makes the case for a radical reconstruction of macro theory on a microsociological base, she also is willing to consider the much

RANDALL COLLINS

An Autobiographical Sketch

I started becoming a sociologist at an early age. My father was working for military intelligence at the end of World War II and then joined the State Department as a foreign service officer. One of my earliest memories is of arriving in Berlin to join him in the summer of 1945. My sisters and I couldn't play in the park because there was live ammunition everywhere, and one day Russian soldiers came into our backyard to dig up a corpse. This gave me a sense that conflict is important and violence always possible.

My father's subsequent tours of duty took us to the Soviet Union, back to Germany (then under American military occupation), to Spain, and South America. In between foreign assignments we would live in the States, so I went back and forth between being an ordinary American kid and being a privileged foreign visitor. I think this resulted in a certain amount of detachment in viewing social relationships. As I got older the diplomatic life looked less dramatic and more like an endless round of formal etiquette in which people never talked about the important politics going on; the split between backstage secrecy and front-stage ceremonial made me ready to appreciate Erving Goffman.

When I was too old to accompany my parents abroad, I was sent to a prep school in New England. This taught me another great sociological reality: the existence of stratification. Many of the other students came from families in the Social Register, and it began to dawn on me that my father was not in the same social class as the ambassadors and undersecretaries of state whose children I sometimes met.

I went on to Harvard, where I changed my major half a dozen times. I studied literature and tried being a playwright and novelist. I went from mathematics to philosophy; I read Freud and planned to become a psychiatrist. I finally majored in social relations, which covered sociology, social psychology, and anthropology. Taking courses from Talcott Parsons settled me onto a path. He covered virtually everything, from the micro to the macro and across the

less radical course of simply integrating microsociological results into macro-social theory. In addition, she seems to take the position that the ultimate goal of microsociological research is a better understanding of the larger society, its structure, and its institutions:

> I . . . believe in the seeming paradox that it is through micro-social approaches that we will learn most about the macro order, for it is these approaches which through their unashamed empiricism afford us a glimpse of the reality about which we speak. Certainly, we will not get a grasp of whatever is the whole of the matter by

range of world history. What I got from him was not so much his own theory but rather the ideal of what sociology could do. He also provided me with some important pieces of cultural capital: that Weber was less concerned with the Protestant Ethic than he was with comparing the dynamics of all the world religions and that Durkheim asked the key question when he tried to uncover the precontractual basis of social order.

I thought I wanted to become a psychologist and went to Stanford, but a year of implanting electrodes in rats' brains convinced me that sociology was a better place to study human beings. I switched universities and arrived in Berkeley in the summer of 1964, just in time to join the civil-rights movement. By the time the free-speech movement emerged on campus in the fall, we were veterans of sit-ins, and being arrested for another cause felt emotionally energizing when one could do it in solidarity with hundreds of others. I was analyzing the sociology of conflict at the same time that we were experiencing it. As the Vietnam War and the racial conflicts at home escalated, the opposition movement began to repudiate its nonviolent principles; many of us became disillusioned and turned to the cultural lifestyle of the hippie dropouts. If you didn't lose your sociological consciousness, it could be illuminating. I studied Erving Goffman along with Herbert Blumer (both of them Berkeley professors at the time) and began to see how all aspects of society—conflict, stratification, and all the rest—are constructed out of the interaction rituals of our everyday lives.

I never set out to be a professor, but by now I have taught in many universities. I tried to put everything together into one book, *Conflict Sociology* (1975), but it turned out I had to write another, *The Credential Society* (1979), to explain the inflationary status system in which we are all enmeshed. Taking my own analysis seriously, I quit the academic world and for a while made a living by writing a novel and textbooks. Eventually, attracted by some interesting colleagues, I got back into teaching. Our field is learning some tremendous things, from a new picture of world history down through the micro details of social emotions. One of the most important influences for me is my second wife, Judith McConnell. She organized women lawyers to break down discriminatory barriers in the legal profession, and now I am learning from her about the backstage politics of the higher judiciary. In sociology and in society, there is plenty yet to be done.

[See also Li, 2005.]

> a microscopic recording of face-to-face interaction. However, it may be enough to begin with if we—for the first time—hear the macro order tick.
>
> (Knorr-Cetina, 1981:41–42)

Thus, it seems clear that Knorr-Cetina takes a far more balanced position on the relationship between the macro and micro levels than does Collins.

An even more integrative position is taken by Aaron Cicourel (1981): "Neither micro nor macro structures are self-contained levels of analysis; they *interact* with each other at all times despite the convenience and sometimes the dubious luxury of

only examining one or the other level of analysis" (Cicourel, 1981:54). There is an implied criticism of Collins here, but Cicourel adopts another position that can be seen as a more direct critique of the kind of position adopted by Collins: "The issue is not simply one of dismissing one level of analysis or another, but showing how they must be integrated if we are not to be convinced about one level to the exclusion of the other by conveniently ignoring competing frameworks for research and theory" (1981:76). To his credit, Cicourel understands not only the importance of linking macro and micro levels but also the fact that that link needs to take place ontologically, theoretically, and methodologically.

Collins continued to subscribe to his micro-reductionistic position for some time. For example, in a later work Collins argued: "Macrostructure consists of nothing more than large numbers of microencounters, repeated (or sometimes changing over time and across space)" (1987:195). He concluded, unashamedly: "This may sound as if I am giving a great deal of prominence to the micro. That is true" (Collins, 1987:195). However, it is worth noting that just one year later Collins (1988a) was willing to give the macro level greater significance. This approach led to a more balanced conception of the micro-macro relationship: "The micro-macro translation shows that everything macro is composed out of micro. Conversely, anything micro is part of the composition of macro; it exists in a macro context . . . it is possible to pursue the micro-macro connection fruitfully in either direction" (Collins, 1988a:244). The latter contention implies a more dialectical approach to the micro-macro relationship. Yet Collins (1988a:244), like Coleman (1986, 1987), subscribes to the view that the "big challenge" in sociology is showing "how micro affects macro." Thus, while Collins has shown some growth in his micro-macro theory, it continues to be a highly limited approach.

Back to the Future: Norbert Elias's Figurational Sociology

We have now discussed some of the major recent American efforts at micro-macro integration. However, there is a European theorist, Norbert Elias, whose work is best discussed under this heading. (For a nice selection of his work, see Mennell and Goudsblom, 1998). Elias was involved in an effort to overcome the micro-macro distinction, and more generally to surmount the tendency of sociologists to distinguish between individuals and society (Dunning, 1986:5; Mennell, 1992; Rundell, 2005). Elias's major work was done in the 1930s, but it has only recently begun to receive the recognition it deserves (Dennis Smith, 2001; Kilminster and Mennell, 2000; Van Krieken, 1998, 2001).

In order to help achieve his integrative goal, Elias proposed the concept of *figuration* (Kasperson and Gabriel, 2008; Mennell, 2005a), an idea which

> makes it possible to resist the socially conditioned pressure to split and polarize our conception of mankind, which has repeatedly prevented us from thinking of people as individuals *at the same time* as thinking of them as societies. . . . The concept of figuration therefore serves as a simple conceptual tool to loosen this social constraint to speak and think as if "the individual" and "society" were antagonistic as well as different.
>
> (Elias, 1978:129–130; italics added)

Figurations can be seen, above all, as processes. In fact, later in his life Elias came to prefer the term *process sociology* to describe his work (Mennell, 1992:252). Figurations are social processes involving the "interweaving" of people. They are *not* structures that are external to and coercive of relationships between people; they *are* those interrelationships. Individuals are seen as open and interdependent; figurations are made up of such individuals. Power is central to social figurations, which are, as a result, constantly in flux:

> At the core of changing figurations—indeed the very hub of the figuration process—is a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro, inclining first to one side and then to the other. This kind of fluctuating balance of power is a structural characteristic of the flow of every figuration.
>
> (Elias, 1978:131)

Figurations emerge and develop, but in largely unseen and unplanned ways.

Central to this discussion is the fact that the idea of a figuration applies at both the micro and the macro levels and to every social phenomenon between those two poles. The concept

> can be applied to relatively small groups just as well as to societies made up of thousands or millions of interdependent people. Teachers and pupils in a class, doctors and patients in a therapeutic group, regular customers at a pub, children at a nursery school—they all make up relatively comprehensible figurations with each other. But the inhabitants of a village, a city or a nation also form figurations, although in this instance the figurations cannot be perceived directly because the *chains of interdependence* which link people together are longer and more differentiated.
>
> (Elias, 1978:131; italics added)

Thus, Elias refuses to deal with the relationship between "individual" and "society" but focuses on "the relationship between people perceived as individuals and people perceived as societies" (Elias, 1986:23). In other words, both individuals and societies (and every social phenomenon in between) involve people—human relationships. The idea of "chains of interdependence" underscored in the extract above is as good an image as any of what Elias means by figurations and what constitutes the focus of his sociology: "How and why people are bound together to form specific dynamic figurations is one of the central questions, perhaps even *the* central question, of sociology" (1969/1983:208).

Elias's notion of figuration is linked to the idea that individuals are open to, and interrelated with, other individuals. He argues that most sociologists operate with a sense of *homo clausus,* that is, "an image of single human beings each of whom is ultimately absolutely independent of all others—an individual-in-himself" (Elias, 1969/1983:143). Such an image does not lend itself to a theory of figurations; an image of open, interdependent actors is needed for figurational sociology.

The History of Manners

If Weber can be seen as being concerned with the rationalization of the West, Elias's focal interest is on the *civilization* of the Occident (Bogner, Baker, and Kilminster,

NORBERT ELIAS

A Biographical Sketch

Norbert Elias had an interesting and instructive career. He produced his most important work in the 1930s, but it was largely ignored at the time and for many years thereafter. However, late in his life Elias and his work were "discovered," especially in England and the Netherlands. Today, Elias's reputation is growing, and his work is receiving increasing attention and recognition throughout the world (Dennis Smith, 2001). Elias lived until he was 93 (he died in 1990), long enough to bask belatedly in long-delayed recognition of the significance of his work.

Elias was born in Breslau, Germany, in 1897 (Mennell, 1992). His father was a small manufacturer, and the family lived a comfortable existence. The home was apparently a loving one, and it imbued Elias with a self-confidence that was to stand him in good stead later when his work was not recognized:

> I put that down to the great feeling of security I had as a child . . . I have a basic feeling of great security, a feeling that in the end things will turn out for the best, and I attribute that to an enormous emotional security which my parents gave me as an only child.
>
> I knew very early on what I wanted to do; I wanted to go to university, and I wanted to do research. I knew that from when I was young, and I have done it, even though sometimes it seemed impossible . . . I had great confidence that in the end my work would be recognized as a valuable contribution to knowledge about humanity.
>
> (Elias, cited in Mennell, 1992:6–7)

Elias served in the German army in World War I and returned after the war to study philosophy and medicine at the University of Breslau. Although he progressed quite far in his medical studies, he eventually dropped them in favor of the study of philosophy. His work in medicine gave him a sense of the interconnections among the various parts of the human body, and that view shaped his orientation to human interconnections—his concern for figurations. Elias received his Ph.D. in January 1924; only then did he go to Heidelberg to learn sociology.

Elias received no pay at Heidelberg, but he did become actively involved in sociology circles at the university. Max Weber had died in 1920, but a salon headed by his wife, Marianne, was active, and Elias became involved in it. He also associated with Max Weber's brother, Alfred, who held a chair in sociology at the university, as well as with Karl Mannheim (described by Elias [1994:34] as "unquestionably brilliant"), who was slightly ahead of Elias in terms of career progress. In fact, Elias became Mannheim's friend and unpaid, unofficial assistant.

When Mannheim was offered a position at the University of Frankfurt in 1930, Elias went with him as his paid and official assistant (on the relationship between the two men and their work, see Kilminster, 1993).

Adolf Hitler came to power in February 1933, and soon after, Elias, like many other Jewish scholars (including Mannheim), went into exile, at first in Paris and later in London (it is believed that Elias's mother died in a concentration camp in 1941). It was in London that he did most of the work on *The Civilizing Process,* which was published in German in 1939. There was no market in Germany then for books written by a Jew, and Elias never received a penny of royalties from that edition. In addition, the book received scant recognition in other parts of the world.

Both during the war and for almost a decade after it, Elias bounced around with no secure employment and remained marginal to British academic circles. However, in 1954 Elias was offered two academic positions, and he accepted the one at Leicester. Thus, Elias *began* his formal academic career at the age of 57! Elias's career blossomed at Leicester, and a number of important publications followed. However, Elias was disappointed with his tenure at Leicester because he failed in his effort to institutionalize a developmental approach that could stand as an alternative to the kinds of static approaches (of Talcott Parsons and others) that were then preeminent in sociology. He was also disappointed that few students adopted his approach; he continued to be a voice in the wilderness, even at Leicester, where the students tended to regard him as an eccentric "voice from the past" (Mennell, 1992:22). Reflective of this feeling of being on the outside is a recurrent dream reported by Elias during those years in which a voice on the telephone repeats, "'Can you speak louder? I can't hear you'" (Mennell, 1992:23). It is interesting to note that throughout his years at Leicester *none* of his books was translated into English and few English sociologists of the day were fluent in German.

However, in continental Europe, especially in the Netherlands and Germany, Elias's work began to be rediscovered in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s Elias began to receive not only academic but public recognition in Europe. Throughout the rest of his life Elias received a number of significant awards, an honorary doctorate, a *Festschrift* in his honor, and a special double issue of *Theory, Culture and Society* devoted to his work.

Interestingly, while Elias has now received wide recognition in sociology (including inclusion in this text), his work has received that recognition during a period in which sociology is growing *less* receptive to his kind of work. That is, the rise of postmodern thinking has led sociologists to question any grand narrative, and Elias's major work, *The Civilizing Process,* is, if nothing else, a grand narrative in the old style (Dennis Smith, 1999). That is, it is concerned with the long-term historical development (admittedly with ebbs and flows) of civilization in the West. The growth of postmodern thinking threatens to limit interest in Elias's work just as it is beginning to receive wide attention.

1992; for an application of his ideas to another part of the world—Singapore—see Stauth, 1997). By the way, Elias is not arguing that there is something inherently good, or better, about civilization as it occurs in the West, or anywhere else for that matter. Nor is he arguing that civilization is inherently bad, although he does recognize that various difficulties have arisen in Western civilization. More generally, Elias (1968/1994:188) is not arguing that to be more civilized is to be better, or conversely that to be less civilized is worse. In saying that people have become more civilized, we are not necessarily saying that they have become better (or worse); we are simply stating a sociological fact. Thus, Elias is concerned with the sociological study of what he calls the "sociogenesis" of civilization in the West (as we will see shortly).

Specifically, Elias is interested in the gradual changes (Elias, 1997) that took place in the behavior and psychological makeup of people in the West. It is an analysis of these changes that is his concern in *The History of Manners,* the first volume of *The Civilizing Process* (1939/1978). In the second volume of *The Civilizing Process, Power and Civility* (1939/1982), Elias turns to the societal changes that accompany, and are closely related to, these behavioral and psychological changes. Overall, Elias is concerned with "the connections between changes in the structure of society and changes in the structure of behavior and psychical makeup" (1939/1994:xv).

In his study of the history of manners, Elias is interested in the gradual, historical transformation of a variety of very mundane behaviors in the direction of what we would now call civilized behavior (although there are also periods of "decivilization"; see Elias, 1995; Mennell, 2005b). Although he begins with the Middle Ages, Elias makes it clear that there is not, and cannot be, such a thing as a starting (or ending) point for the development of civilization: "Nothing is more fruitless, when dealing with long-term social processes, than to attempt to locate an absolute beginning" (Elias, 1969/1983:232). That is, civilizing processes can be traced back to ancient times, continue to this day, and will continue into the future. Civilization is an ongoing developmental process that Elias is picking up, for convenience, in the Middle Ages. He is interested in tracing such things as changes in what embarrasses us, our increasing sensitivity, how we've grown increasingly observant of others, and our sharpened understanding of others. However, the best way of gaining an understanding of what Elias is doing is not through abstractions but through a discussion of some of his concrete examples.

Behavior at the Table Elias's most basic point is that the threshold of embarrassment has gradually advanced. What people did at the table with little or no embarrassment in the thirteenth century would cause much mortification in the nineteenth century. What is regarded as distasteful is over time increasingly likely to be *"removed behind the scenes of social life"* (Elias, 1939/1994:99).

For example, a thirteenth-century poem warned, "A number of people gnaw on a bone and then put it back in the dish—this is a serious offense" (Elias, 1939/1994:68). Another thirteenth-century volume warns, "It is not decent to poke your fingers into your ears or eyes, as some people do, or to pick your nose while eating" (Elias, 1939/1994:71). Clearly, the implication of these warnings is that many people at that time engaged in such behaviors and that it generally caused them, or those around

them, no embarrassment. There was a perceived need for such admonitions because people did not know that such behavior was "uncivilized." As time goes by there is less and less need to warn people about such things as picking one's nose while eating. Thus, a late-sixteenth-century document says, "Nothing is more improper than to lick your fingers, to touch the meats and put them into your mouth with your hand, to stir sauce with your fingers, or to dip bread into it with your fork and then suck it" (Elias, 1939/1994:79). Of course, there *are* things, picking one's nose, for example, more improper than licking one's fingers, but by this time civilization has progressed to the point where it is widely recognized that such behaviors are uncivilized. With nose picking safely behind the scenes, society found other, less egregious behaviors that it defined as uncivilized.

Natural Functions

A similar trend is found in the performance of natural functions. A fourteenth-century book used by schoolchildren, among others, found it necessary to offer advice on the expelling of wind:

> To contract an illness: Listen to the old maxim about the sound of wind. If it can be purged without a noise that is best. But it is better that it be emitted with a noise than it be held back. . . .
>
> . . . The sound of farting, especially of those who stand on elevated ground, is horrible. One should make sacrifices with the buttocks pressed firmly together . . .
>
> . . . let a cough hide the explosive sound . . . Follow the law of Chiliades: Replace farts with coughs.
>
> (Elias, 1939/1994:106)

Here we see things being discussed openly that by the nineteenth century (and certainly today) it was no longer necessary to mention because it had come to be well known that the behaviors in question were uncivilized. Further, we are likely to be startled by such a discussion, which offends our contemporary sense of propriety. But all this reflects the process of civilization and the movement of the "frontier of embarrassment" (Elias, 1939/1994:107). Things that could be discussed openly have over time progressively moved beyond that frontier. The fact that we are startled by reading advice on farting reflects the fact that the frontier today is very different from what it was in the fourteenth century.

Elias relates this change in the notion of the appropriate way to expel wind to changes in social figurations, especially in the French court. More people were living in closer proximity and in more permanent interdependence. Therefore, there was a greater need to regulate people's impulses and to get them to practice greater restraint. The control over impulses that began in the higher echelons of the court eventually was transmitted to those of lower social status. The need to extend these restraints was made necessary by further figurational changes, especially people of different statuses moving closer together, becoming more interdependent, and by the decreasing rigidity of the stratification system, which made it easier for those of lower status to interact with those of higher status. As a result, to put it baldly, there was increasingly just as much need for the lower classes to control their wind (and many other behaviors) as

there was for the upper classes. At the same time, those from the upper classes needed to control their wind in the presence not only of peers but of social inferiors as well.

Elias sums up his discussion of such natural functions:

> Society is gradually beginning to suppress the positive pleasure component in certain functions more and more strongly by the arousal of anxiety; or, more exactly, it is rendering this pleasure 'private' and 'secret' (i.e. suppressing it within the individual), while fostering the negatively charged affects—displeasure, revulsion, distaste—as the only feelings customary in society.
>
> (Elias, 1939/1994:117)

Blowing One's Nose A similar process is seen in the restraints on blowing one's nose. For example, a fifteenth-century document warned, "Do not blow your nose with the same hand that you use to hold the meat" (Elias, 1939/1994:118). Or, in the sixteenth century, the reader is informed, "Nor is it seemly, after wiping your nose, to spread out your handkerchief and peer into it as if pearls and rubies might have fallen out of your head" (Elias, 1939/1994:119). However, by the late eighteenth century these kinds of details are avoided in sources of advice: "Every voluntary movement of the nose . . . is impolite and puerile. To put your fingers into your nose is a revolting impropriety. . . . You should observe, in blowing your nose, all the rules of propriety and cleanliness" (Elias, 1939/1994:121). As Elias says, "The 'conspiracy of silence' is spreading" (1939/1994:121). That is, things that could be discussed openly a century or two before are now discussed more discreetly, or not at all. The "shame frontier" as it relates to blowing one's nose, and many other things, has progressed. Shame has come to be attached to things (for example, blowing one's nose, farting) that in the past were not considered shameful. More and more walls are being erected between people so that things that formerly could be done in the presence of others are now hidden from view.

Sexual Relations Elias describes the same general trend in sexual relations. In the Middle Ages it was common for many people, including men and women, to spend the night together in the same room. And it was not uncommon for them to sleep naked. However, over time, it came to be viewed as increasingly shameful to show oneself naked in the presence of the opposite sex. As an example of "uncivilized" sexual behavior, Elias describes the following wedding customs beginning in the Middle Ages:

> The procession into the bridal chamber was led by the best man. The bride was undressed by the bridesmaids; she had to take off all finery. The bridal bed had to be mounted in the presence of witnesses if the marriage was to be valid. They were "laid together." "Once in bed you are rightly wed," the saying went. In the later Middle Ages this custom gradually changed to the extent that the couple was allowed to lie on the bed in their clothes. . . . Even in the absolutist society of France, bride and bridegroom were taken to bed by the guests, undressed, and given their nightdress.
>
> (Elias, 1939/1994:145–146)

Clearly, this changed further over time with the advance of civilization. Today, everything that occurs in the wedding bed is concealed, taking place behind the scenes and out of the sight of all observers. More generally, sexual life has been taken out of the larger society and enclosed within the nuclear family.

Overall, in the *History of Manners* Elias is concerned with changes in the way individuals think, act, and interact. He sometimes speaks of this, in general, as a change in "personality structure," but Elias seems to be describing more than changes in personality; he also is describing changes in the way people act and interact. Taken together, it could be argued that the *History of Manners* focuses largely on micro-level concerns. However, two factors militate against such an interpretation. First, Elias often deals in *The History of Manners* with concomitant macro-level changes (in the court, for example), and he argues that "the structures of personality and of society evolve in indissoluble interrelationship" (1968/1994:188). Second, *The History of Manners* is written with the awareness that *Power and Civility,* dealing focally with these more macro-level changes, is to accompany it. Nonetheless, even though Elias wishes to avoid the micro-macro dichotomy, *The Civilizing Process* consists of two separate volumes, the first focally concerned with micro issues and the second interested mainly in macro questions.

Power and Civility

If self-constraint is the key to the civilizing process, then what Elias is concerned with in *Power and Civility* are the changes in social constraint that are associated with this rise in self-restraint. However, Elias, despite his later overt rejection of the micro-macro distinction, seems to announce that in *Power and Civility* he is dealing with another, more "macroscopic" level of analysis:

> *This basic tissue resulting from the many single plans and actions of men can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created. From this interdependence of people arises an order sui generis, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it.* It is this order of interweaving human impulses and strivings, this social order, which determines the course of historical change; it underlies the civilizing process.
>
> (Elias, 1939/1982:230)

These are strong, almost Durkheimian words, depicting a unique (*sui generis*) and compelling reality that "determines the course of historical change." In spite of Elias's later rhetoric about the need to overcome the micro-macro distinction, such a position is not, in the main, supported by *Power and Civility,* which tends at times to deal with the effect, sometimes the determining effect, of macro structures on micro-level phenomena. (However, we hasten to add that Elias often says that he is merely interested in the covariation of macro and micro phenomena, or the connection between "specific changes in the structure of human relations and the corresponding changes in the structure of the personality" [1939/1982:231].)

Reflective of his difficulties in dealing with micro and macro in an integrated way is the fact that Elias distinguishes between *psychogenetic* and *sociogenetic*

investigations. In a psychogenetic investigation, one focuses on individual psychology, whereas sociogenetic investigations have a larger radius and a longer-range perspective, focusing on "the overall structure, not only of a single state society but of the social field formed by a specific group of interdependent societies, and of the sequential order of its evolution" (Elias, 1939/1982:287–288).

Lengthening Interdependency Chains What is the macro-structural change that is of such great importance to the process of civilization? It can be described as the lengthening of "interdependency chains":

> From the earliest period of the history of the Occident to the present, social functions have become more and more differentiated under the pressure of competition. The more differentiated they become, the larger grows the number of functions and thus of people on whom the individual constantly depends in all his actions, from the simplest and most commonplace to the more complex and uncommon. As more and more people must attune their conduct to that of others, the web of actions must be organized more and more strictly and accurately, if each individual action is to fulfil its social function. The individual is compelled to regulate his conduct in an increasingly differentiated, more even and stable manner . . . the more complex and stable control of conduct is increasingly instilled in the individual from his earliest years as an automatism, a self-compulsion that he cannot resist even if he consciously wishes to.
>
> (Elias, 1939/1982:232–233)

The result of all this is "the lengthening of the chains of social action and interdependence," which is what contributes to the corresponding need for individuals to moderate their emotions by developing the "habit of connecting events in terms of chains of cause and effect" (Elias, 1939/1982:236).

Thus, to Elias, the increasing differentiation of social functions plays a key role in the civilization process. In addition to, and in conjunction with, this differentiation is the importance of what Elias calls "a total reorganization of the social fabric" (1939/1982:234). Here he is describing the historical process that witnessed the emergence of increasingly stable central organs of society that monopolize the means of physical force and of taxation. Crucial to this development is the emergence of a king with absolute status, as well as of the court society (especially in France and during the reign of Louis XIV, although the courts of Europe came to be closely linked). What Elias calls a "royal mechanism" is operating here—kings are able to emerge in a specific figuration where competing functional groups are ambivalent (they were characterized by both mutual dependency and hostility) and power is evenly distributed between them, thus prohibiting a decisive conflict or a decisive compromise. As Elias puts it, "Not by chance, not whenever a strong ruling personality is born, but when a specific social structure provides the opportunity, does the central organ attain that optimal power which usually finds expression in strong autocracy" (1939/1982:174). In other words, a king emerges when the appropriate figuration is in place.

The king's court took on special importance for Elias because it was here that changes took place that eventually affected the whole of society. In contrast to the

warrior, whose short chains of dependence made it relatively easy for him to engage in violent behavior, the court noble, with much longer chains of dependence on many other nobles, found it necessary to be increasingly sensitive to others. The noble also found it increasingly difficult to give free play to his emotions through violence or any other action. The noble was further limited by the fact that the king was gaining increasing control over the means of violence. "The monopolization of physical violence, the concentration of arms and armed men under one authority . . . forces unarmed men in the pacified social spaces to restrain their own violence through foresight or reflection; in other words it imposes on people a greater or lesser degree of self-control" (Elias, 1939/1982:239). The monopoly of violence is intimately related to the ability of the king to monopolize taxation, because taxes are what allow the king to pay for control over the means of violence (Elias, 1939/1982:208). In fact, Elias describes a situation that involves the interplay of these two monopolies: "The financial means thus flowing into this central authority maintains its monopoly of military force, while this in turn maintains the monopoly of taxation" (1939/1982:104). In addition, the increase in the king's income is accompanied by a reduction of the nobility's, and this disparity serves to enhance further the power of the king (Elias, 1969/1983:155).

The nobles play a key role in the civilization process because changes that take place among this elite group are gradually disseminated throughout society:

> It is in this courtly society that the basic stock of models of conduct is formed which then, fused with others and modified in accordance with the position of the groups carrying them, spread, with the compulsion to exercise foresight, to ever-wider circles of functions. Their special situation makes the people of courtly society, more than any other Western group affected by this movement, specialists in the elaboration and moulding of social conduct.
>
> (Elias, 1939/1982:258)

Furthermore, these changes that started in the West began to spread through many other parts of the world.

The rise of the king and the court and the transition from warrior to courtier (or the "courtization" of the warrior) represent for Elias a key "spurt" in the civilizing process. This idea of "spurts" is central to Elias's theory of social change; he does not view change as a smooth, unilinear process, but rather one with much stopping and starting—much to-and-fro movement.

Although Elias gives great importance to the rise of the court,[4] the ultimate cause of the decisive changes that ensued was the change in the entire social figuration of the time. That is, the key was the changes in various relationships among groups (for example, between warriors and nobles), as well as changes in the relationships among individuals in those groups. Furthermore, this figuration was constraining on nobles and king alike: "Princes and aristocratic groups are apt to appear as people leading a free and unconstrained life. Here . . . it emerged very clearly to what constraints upper classes, and not least their most powerful member, the absolute monarch, are subjected" (Elias, 1969/1983:266).

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[4] For an interesting study of the court, the bourgeoisie, and their impact on Mozart, see Elias (1993).

From the dominance of the king and his nobles there is gradual movement toward a state. In other words, once a private monopoly (by the king) of arms and taxes is in place, the ground is set for the public monopoly of those resources—that is, the emergence of the state. There is a direct link between the growth of the king and later the state as controlling agencies in society and the development of a parallel controlling agency within the individual. Together, they begin to wield unprecedented power over the individual's ability to act on his or her emotions. It is not that before this time people totally lacked self-control, but self-control grew more continuous and stable, affecting more and more aspects of people's lives. Elias's argument is very close to Durkheim's when he contends that with the longer chains of interdependence, "the individual learns to control himself more steadily; he is now less a prisoner of his passions" (1939/1982:241).

An interesting aspect of Elias's argument is that he recognizes that this control over passions is not an unmitigated good. Life has grown less dangerous, but it has also become less pleasurable. Unable to express their emotions directly, people need to find other outlets, such as in their dreams or through books. In addition, what were external struggles may come to be internalized as, in Freudian terms, battles between the id and the superego. (Elias's thinking on the individual was heavily influenced by Freudian theory.) Thus, while the greater control over passions brings a welcome reduction in violence, it also brings with it increasing boredom and restlessness.

The longer dependency chains are associated not only with greater affective control but with increasing sensitivity to others and to the self. Furthermore, people's judgments become more finely shaded and nuanced, making them better able to judge and control both themselves and others. Before the rise of the court society, people had to protect themselves from violence and death. Afterward, as this danger receded, people could afford to grow more sensitive to far more subtle threats and actions. This greater sensitivity is a key aspect of the civilizing process and a key contributor to its further development.

Agency-Structure Integration

Paralleling the growth in interest in American sociological theory in the micro-macro issue has been an increase in interest among European theorists in the relationship between agency and structure. In fact, this interest is so intense that Fuller (1998) has called it a "craze." For example, Margaret Archer has contended that "the problem of structure and agency has rightly come to be seen as the basic issue in modern social theory" (1988:ix). In fact, she argues that dealing with this linkage (as well as a series of other linkages implied by it) has become the "acid test" of a general social theory and the "central problem" in theory (Archer, 1988:x). Earlier, Dawe went even further than Archer: *"Here, then, is the problematic around which the entire history of sociological analysis could be written: the problematic of human agency"* (1978:379). Implied in Dawe's concern with agency is also an interest in social structure as well as the constant tension between them.[5]

[5] In fact, agency often is used in such a way as to include a concern for structure (Abrams, 1982:xiii).

At a superficial level the micro-macro and agency-structure issues sound similar, and they often are treated as if they resembled one another greatly. However, there are other ways to think of both agency-structure and micro-macro issues that make the significant differences between these two conceptualizations quite clear.

Although *agency* generally refers to micro-level, individual human actors,[6] it also can refer to (macro) collectivities that act. For example, Burns sees human agents as including "individuals as well as organized groups, organizations and nations" (1986:9). Touraine (1977) focuses on social classes as actors. If we accept such collectivities as agents, we cannot equate agency and micro-level phenomena. In addition, although *structure* usually refers to large-scale social structures, it also can refer to micro structures such as those involved in human interaction. Giddens's definition of *systems* (which is closer to the usual meaning of *structure* than is his own concept of structure) implies both types of structures, because it involves "reproduced relations between actors or collectivities" (1979:66). Thus, both *agency* and *structure* can refer to either micro-level or macro-level phenomena or to both.

Turning to the micro-macro distinction, *micro* often refers to the kind of conscious, creative actor of concern to many agency theorists, but it also can refer to a more mindless "behaver" of interest to behaviorists, exchange theorists, and rational choice theorists. Similarly, the term *macro* can refer not only to large-scale social structures but also to the cultures of collectivities. Thus, *micro* may or may not refer to "agents," and *macro* may or may not refer to "structures."

When we look closely at the micro-macro and agency-structure schemas, we find that there are substantial differences between them.

Major Examples of Agency-Structure Integration

Structuration Theory

One of the best-known and most articulated efforts to integrate agency and structure is Anthony Giddens's structuration theory (Bryant and Jary, 2000; I. Cohen, 2005, 1989; Craib, 1992; Held and Thompson, 1989). Giddens goes so far as to say, "Every research investigation in the social sciences or history is involved in relating action [often used synonymously with *agency*] to structure . . . there is no sense in which structure 'determines' action or vice versa" (1984:219).

Although Giddens is not a Marxist, there is a powerful Marxian influence in his work, and he even sees *The Constitution of Society* as an extended reflection on Marx's inherently integrative dictum: "Men make history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past" (Marx, 1869/1963:15).[7]

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[6] A variety of contemporary theorists, especially those associated with poststructuralism and postmodernism, have questioned and even rejected the idea of human agency. See, for example, M. Jones (1996).

[7] It is appropriate to accord Marx such a central place in structuration theory and, more generally, in theories that integrate agency and structure. As I have written elsewhere, Marx's work is the best "exemplar for an integrated sociological paradigm" (Ritzer, 1981a:232).

Marx's theory is but one of many theoretical inputs into structuration theory. At one time or another, Giddens has analyzed and critiqued most major theoretical orientations and derived a range of useful ideas from many of them. Structuration theory is extraordinarily eclectic; in fact, Craib (1992:20–31) outlines nine major inputs into Giddens's thinking.

Giddens surveys a wide range of theories that begin with either the individual/agent (for example, symbolic interactionism) or the society/structure (for example, structural functionalism) and rejects both of these polar alternatives. Rather, Giddens argues that we must begin with "recurrent social practices" (1989:252). Giving slightly more detail, he argues: "The basic domain of the study of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across time and space" (Giddens, 1984:2).

At its core Giddens's structuration theory, with its focus on social practices, is a theory of the relationship between agency and structure. According to Richard J. Bernstein, "the very heart of the theory of structuration" is "intended to illuminate the duality and dialectical interplay of agency and structure" (1989:23). Thus, agency and structure cannot be conceived of apart from one another; they are two sides of the same coin. In Giddens's terms, they are a duality. All social action involves structure, and all structure involves social action. Agency and structure are inextricably interwoven in ongoing human activity or practice.

As pointed out earlier, Giddens's analytical starting point is human practices, but he insists that they be seen as recursive. That is, activities are "not brought into being by social actors but are continually recreated by them via the very means whereby they express themselves as actors. In and through their activities agents produce the conditions that make these activities possible" (Giddens, 1984:2). Thus, activities are not produced by consciousness, by the social construction of reality, nor are they produced by social structure. Rather, in expressing themselves as actors, people are engaging in practice, and it is through that practice that both consciousness and structure are produced. Focusing on the recursive character of structure, Held and Thompson argue that "structure is reproduced in and through the succession of situated practices which are organized by it" (1989:7). The same thing can be said about consciousness. Giddens is concerned with consciousness, or reflexivity. However, in being reflexive, the human actor not only is self-conscious but also is engaged in the monitoring of the ongoing flow of activities and structural conditions. Bernstein argues that "agency itself is reflexively and recursively implicated in social structures" (1989:23). Most generally, it can be argued that Giddens is concerned with the dialectical process in which practice, structure, and consciousness are produced. Thus, Giddens deals with the agency-structure issue in a historical, processual, and dynamic way.

Not only are social actors reflexive, so are the social researchers who are studying them. This idea leads Giddens to his well-known ideas on the "double hermeneutic." Both social actors and sociologists use language. Actors use language to account for what they do, and sociologists, in turn, use language to account for the actions of social actors. Thus, we need to be concerned with the relationship between lay and scientific language. We particularly need to be aware of the fact that the social

scientist's understanding of the social world may have an impact on the understandings of the actors being studied. In that way, social researchers can alter the world they are studying and thus come up with distorted findings and conclusions.

Elements of Structuration Theory Let us discuss some of the major components of Giddens's structuration theory, starting with his thoughts on agents, who, as we have seen, continuously monitor their own thoughts and activities as well as their physical and social contexts. In their search for a sense of security, actors rationalize their world. By rationalization Giddens means the development of routines that not only give actors a sense of security but enable them to deal efficiently with their social lives. Actors also have motivations to act, and these motivations involve the wants and desires that prompt action. Thus, while rationalization and reflexivity are continuously involved in action, motivations are more appropriately thought of as potentials for action. Motivations provide overall plans for action, but most of our action, in Giddens's view, is not directly motivated. Although such action is not motivated and our motivations are generally unconscious, motivations play a significant role in human conduct.

Also within the realm of consciousness, Giddens makes a (permeable) distinction between discursive and practical consciousness. *Discursive consciousness* entails the ability to describe our actions in words. *Practical consciousness* involves actions that the actors take for granted, without being able to express in words what they are doing. It is the latter type of consciousness that is particularly important to structuration theory, reflecting a primary interest in what is done rather than what is said.

Given this focus on practical consciousness, we make a smooth transition from agents to agency, the things that agents actually *do:* "Agency concerns events of which an individual is a perpetrator. . . . Whatever happened would not have happened if that individual had not intervened" (Giddens, 1984:9). Thus, Giddens gives great (his critics say too much) weight to the importance of agency (Baber, 1991). Giddens takes great pains to separate agency from intentions because he wants to make the point that actions often end up being different from what was intended; in other words, intentional acts often have unintended consequences. The idea of unintended consequences plays a great role in Giddens's theory and is especially important in getting us from agency to the social-system level.

Consistent with his emphasis on agency, Giddens accords the agent great power. In other words, Giddens's agents have the ability to make a difference in the social world. Even more strongly, agents make no sense without power; that is, an actor ceases to be an agent if he or she loses the capacity to make a difference. Giddens certainly recognizes that there are constraints on actors, but this does not mean that actors have no choices and make no difference. To Giddens, power is logically prior to subjectivity because action involves power, or the ability to transform the situation. Thus, Giddens's structuration theory accords power to the actor and action and is in opposition to theories that are disinclined to such an orientation and instead grant great importance either to the intent of the actor (phenomenology) or to the external structure (structural functionalism).

The conceptual core of structuration theory lies in the ideas of structure, system, and duality of structure. *Structure* is defined as "the structuring properties [*rules and*

resources] . . . the properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them systemic form" (Giddens, 1984:17). Structure is made possible by the existence of rules and resources. Structures themselves do not exist in time and space. Rather, social phenomena have the capacity to become structured. Giddens contends that "structure only exists in and through the activities of human agents" (1989:256). Thus, Giddens offers a very unusual definition of *structure* that does not follow the Durkheimian pattern of viewing structures as external to and coercive of actors. He takes pains to avoid the impression that structure is "outside" or "external" to human action. "In my usage, structure is what gives form and shape to social life, but it is not *itself* that form and shape" (Giddens, 1989:256). As Held and Thompson put it, structure to Giddens is not a framework "like the girders of a building or the skeleton of a body" (1989:4).

Giddens does not deny the fact that structure can be constraining on action, but he feels that sociologists have exaggerated the importance of this constraint. Furthermore, they have failed to emphasize the fact that structure "is *always* both constraining *and* enabling" (Giddens, 1984:25, 163; italics added). Structures often allow agents to do things they would not otherwise be able to do. Although Giddens deemphasizes structural constraint, he does recognize that actors can lose control over the "structured properties of social systems" as they stretch away in time and space. However, he is careful to avoid Weberian iron-cage imagery and notes that such a loss of control is *not* inevitable.

The conventional sociological sense of structure is closer to Giddens's concept of social system (J. Thompson, 1989:60). Giddens defines *social systems* as reproduced social practices, or "reproduced relations between actors or collectivities organized as regular social practices" (1984:17, 25). Thus the idea of the social system is derived from Giddens's focal concern with practice. Social systems do *not* have structures, but they do exhibit structural properties. Structures do not themselves exist in time and space, but they are manifested in social systems in the form of reproduced practices. Although some social systems may be the product of intentional action, Giddens places greater emphasis on the fact that such systems are often the unanticipated consequences of human action. These unanticipated consequences may become unrecognized conditions of action and feed back into it. These conditions may elude efforts to bring them under control, but nevertheless actors continue their efforts to exert such control.

Thus structures are "instantiated" in social systems. In addition, they are also manifest in "memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents" (Giddens, 1984:17). As a result, rules and resources manifest themselves at both the macro level of social systems and the micro level of human consciousness.

We are now ready for the concept of *structuration,* which is premised on the idea that "[t]he constitution of agents and structures are not two independently given sets of phenomena, a dualism, but represent a duality . . . the structural properties of social systems are both medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organize," or "the moment of the production of action is also one of reproduction in the contexts of the day-to-day enactment of social life" (Giddens, 1984:25, 26). It is clear that structuration involves the dialectical relationship between structure and agency (Rachlin, 1991). Structure and agency are a duality; neither can exist without the other.

As has already been indicated, *time* and *space* are crucial variables in Giddens's theory. Both depend on whether other people are present temporally or spatially. The primordial condition is face-to-face interaction, in which others are present at the same time and in the same space. However, social systems extend in time and space, and so others may no longer be present. Such distancing in terms of time and space is made increasingly possible in the modern world by new forms of communication and transportation. Gregory (1989) argues that Giddens devotes more attention to time than to space. Underscoring the importance of space, Saunders contends that "any sociological analysis of *why* and *how* things happen will need to take account of *where* (and when) they happen" (1989:218). The central sociological issue of social order depends on how well social systems are integrated over time and across space. One of Giddens's most widely recognized achievements in social theory is his effort to bring the issues of time and space to the fore (Bryant and Jary, 2001b).

We end this section by bringing Giddens's very abstract structuration theory closer to reality by discussing the research program that can be derived from it. (For an overview of empirical research based on structuration theory see Bryant and Jary, 2001a.) First, instead of focusing on human societies, structuration theory would concentrate on "the orderings of institutions across time and space" (Giddens, 1989:300). (Institutions are viewed by Giddens as clusters of practices, and he identifies four of them—symbolic orders, political institutions, economic institutions, and law.) Second, there would be a focal concern for changes in institutions over time and space. Third, researchers would need to be sensitive to the ways in which the leaders of various institutions intrude on and alter social patterns. Fourth, structurationists would need to monitor, and be sensitive to, the impact of their findings on the social world. Most generally, Giddens is deeply concerned with the "shattering impact of modernity" (1989:301), and the structurationist should be concerned with the study of this pressing social problem.

There is much more to structuration theory than can be presented here; Giddens goes into great detail about the elements of the theory already outlined and discusses many others as well. Along the way he analyzes, integrates, and/or critiques a wide range of theoretical ideas. More recently, he has been devoting increasing attention to utilizing his theory for critical analysis of the modern world (Giddens, 1990, 1991, 1992; see Chapter 15). Unlike many others, Giddens has gone beyond a program statement for agency-structure integration; he has given a detailed analysis of its various elements and, more important, has focused on the nature of the interrelationship. What is most satisfying about Giddens's approach is the fact that his key concern, structuration, is defined in inherently integrative terms. The constitutions of agents and structures are not independent of one another; the properties of social systems are seen as both medium and outcome of the practices of actors, and those system properties recursively organize the practices of actors.

Layder, Ashton, and Sung (1991) have sought empirical evidence of Giddens's structuration theory in a study of the transition from school to work. Although they generally support his theoretical approach, their most important conclusion is that structure and agency are not as intertwined as Giddens suggests: "Thus we conclude

that empirically structure and action are interdependent (and thus, deeply implicated in each other), *but partly autonomous and separable domains*" (Layder, Ashton, and Sung, 1991:461; italics added).

Criticisms Ian Craib (1992) has offered the most systematic criticism of Giddens's structuration theory (for a more general critique, see Mestrovic, 1998). First, Craib argues that because Giddens focuses on social practices, his work lacks "ontological depth." That is, Giddens fails to get at the social structures that underlie the social world. Second, his effort at theoretical synthesis does not mesh well with the complexity of the social world. To deal with this complexity, instead of a single synthetic theory "we require a range of theories that might be quite incompatible" (Craib, 1992:178). The social world is also, in Craib's view, quite messy, and that messiness cannot be dealt with adequately by a single, conceptually neat approach like structuration theory. Giddens's approach also serves to limit the potential contributions that could be derived by employing the full range of sociological theories. In rejecting metatheories such as positivism and theories such as structural functionalism, Giddens is unable to derive useful ideas from them. Even when he does draw upon other theories, Giddens uses only some aspects of those theories, and as a result, he does not get all he can out of them. Third, since Giddens offers no base point from which he can operate, he lacks an adequate basis for critical analysis of modern society (see Chapter 15). As a result, his criticisms tend to have an ad hoc quality rather than emanating systematically from a coherent theoretical core. Fourth, Giddens's theory, in the end, seems quite fragmented. His eclecticism leads him to accumulate various theoretical bits and pieces that do not necessarily hold together well. Finally, it is difficult, if not impossible, to know exactly what Giddens is talking about (Mestrovic, 1998:207). Many times throughout his analysis, Craib indicates that he is unsure about, is guessing at, Giddens's meaning.

Given the number and severity of the criticisms, Craib asks, Why, then, deal with structuration theory at all? He offers two basic reasons. First, many of Giddens's ideas (for example, structures as both constraining and enabling) have become integral parts of contemporary sociology. Second, anyone working in social theory today needs to take into account, and respond to, Giddens's work. Craib closes with the faintest of praise for Giddens's work: "I find it difficult to conceive of any social theory that would not find *something* in his work on which to build. *For the time being,* at any rate, structuration theory will be the food at the centre of the plate" (1992:196; italics added).

Habitus and Field

Pierre Bourdieu's (1984a:483; Calhoun, 2000) theory was animated by the desire to overcome what Bourdieu considered to be the false opposition between objectivism and subjectivism, or in his words, the "absurd opposition between individual and society" (Bourdieu, 1990:31). As he put it, "the most steadfast (and, in my eyes, the most important) intention guiding my work has been to overcome the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism" (1989:15).

He placed Durkheim and his study of social facts (see Chapter 3) and the structuralism of Saussure, Lévi-Strauss, and the structural Marxists (see Chapter 17) within the objectivist camp. These perspectives are criticized for focusing on objective structures and ignoring the process of social construction by which actors perceive, think about, and construct these structures and then proceed to act on that basis. Objectivists ignore agency and the agent, whereas Bourdieu favored a position that is structuralist without losing sight of the agent. "My intention was to bring real-life actors back in who had vanished at the hands of Lévi-Strauss and other structuralists, especially Althusser" (Bourdieu, cited in Jenkins, 1992:18).

This goal moved Bourdieu (1980/1990:42) in the direction of a subjectivist position, one that during his days as a student was dominated by Sartre's existentialism. In addition, Schutz's phenomenology, Blumer's symbolic interactionism, and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology are thought of as examples of subjectivism, focusing on the way agents think about, account for, or represent the social world while ignoring the objective structures in which those processes exist. Bourdieu saw these theories as concentrating on agency and ignoring structure.

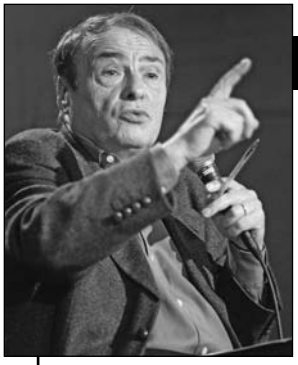
Instead, Bourdieu focused on the dialectical relationship between objective structures and subjective phenomena:

> On the one hand, the objective structures . . . form the basis for . . . representations and constitute the structural constraints that bear upon interactions: but, on the other hand, these representations must also be taken into consideration, particularly if one wants to account for the daily struggles, individual and collective, which purport to transform or to preserve these structures.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1989:15)

To sidestep the objectivist-subjectivist dilemma, Bourdieu (1977:3) focused on *practice,* which he saw as the outcome of the dialectical relationship between structure and agency. Practices are not objectively determined, nor are they the product of free will. (Another reason for Bourdieu's focus on practice is that such a concern avoids the often irrelevant intellectualism that he associated with objectivism and subjectivism.)

Reflecting his interest in the dialectic between structure and the way people construct social reality, Bourdieu labeled his own orientation "constructivist structuralism," "structuralist constructivism," or "genetic structuralism." Here is the way Bourdieu defined genetic structuralism:

> The analysis of objective structures—those of different fields—is inseparable from the analysis of the genesis, within biological individuals, of the mental structures which are to some extent the product of the incorporation of social structures; inseparable, too, from the analysis of the genesis of these social structures themselves: the social space, and of the groups that occupy it, are the products of historical struggles (in which agents participate in accordance with their position in the social space and with the mental structures through which they apprehend this space).
>
> (Bourdieu, 1990:14)



Pierre Bourdieu

A Biographical Sketch

Born in a small rural town in southeast France in 1930, Bourdieu grew up in a lower-middle-class household (his father was a civil servant) (Jenkins, 2005a; Monnier, 2007). In the early 1950s he attended, and received a degree from, a prestigious teaching college in Paris, Ecole Normale Superieure. However, he refused to write a thesis, in part because he objected to the mediocre quality of his education and to the authoritarian structure of the school. He was put off by, and was active in the opposition against, the strong communist, especially Stalinist, orientation of the school.

Bourdieu taught briefly in a provincial school but was drafted in 1956 and spent two years in Algeria with the French Army. He wrote a book about his experiences and remained in Algeria for two years after his army tenure was over. He returned to France in 1960 and worked for a year as an assistant at the University of Paris. He attended the lectures of the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss at College de France and worked as an assistant to the sociologist Raymond Aron. Bourdieu moved to the University of Lille for three years and then returned to the powerful position of Director of Studies at L'Ecole Practique des Hautes Etudes in 1964.

In the succeeding years Bourdieu became a major figure in Parisian, French, and ultimately world intellectual circles. His work has had an impact on a number of different fields, including education, anthropology, and sociology. He gathered a group of disciples around him in the 1960s, and since then his followers have collaborated with him and made intellectual contributions of their own. In 1968 the Centre de Sociologie Européenne was founded, and Bourdieu was its director until his death. Associated with the center was a unique publishing venture, *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales,* that has been an important outlet for the work of Bourdieu and his supporters.

When Raymond Aron retired in 1981, the prestigious chair in sociology at College de France became open, and most of the leading French sociologists (for example, Raymond Boudon and Alain Touraine) were in competition for it. However, the chair was awarded to Bourdieu (Jenkins, 1992). In the time that followed, Bourdieu was, if anything, even more prolific than before, and his reputation continued to grow (for more on Bourdieu, see Swartz, 1997:15–51).

An interesting aspect of Bourdieu's work is the way in which his ideas were shaped in ongoing, sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, dialogue with others. For example, many of his early ideas were formed in a dialogue with two of the leading scholars of the day during his years of training—Jean-Paul Sartre and Claude Lévi-Strauss. From the existentialism of Sartre, Bourdieu got a strong sense of actors as creators of their social worlds. However, Bourdieu felt

that Sartre had gone too far and accorded the actors too much power and in the process ignored the structural constraints on them. Pulled in the direction of structure, Bourdieu naturally turned to the work of the preeminent structuralist, Lévi-Strauss. At first Bourdieu was strongly drawn to this orientation; in fact, he described himself for a time as a "'blissful structuralist'" (cited in Jenkins, 1992:17). However, some of his early research led him to the conclusion that structuralism was as limiting, albeit in a different direction, as existentialism. He objected to the fact that the structuralists saw themselves as privileged observers of people who are presumed to be controlled by structures of which they are unconscious. Bourdieu came to have little regard for a field that focused solely on such structural constraints, saying that sociology

> would perhaps not be worth an hour's trouble if it solely had as its end the intention of exposing the wires which activate the individuals it observes—if it forgot that it has to do with men, even those who, like puppets, play a game of which they do not know the rules—if, in short, it did not give itself the task of restoring to men the meaning of their actions.
>
> (Bourdieu, cited in Robbins, 1991:37)

Bourdieu defined one of his basic objectives in reaction to the excesses of structuralism: "'My intention was to bring real-life actors back in who had vanished at the hands of Lévi-Strauss and other structuralists . . . through being considered as epiphenomena of structures'" (cited in Jenkins, 1992:17–18). In other words, Bourdieu wanted to integrate at least a part of Sartre's existentialism with Lévi-Strauss's structuralism.

Bourdieu's thinking also was profoundly shaped by Marxian theory and the Marxists. As we have seen, as a student Bourdieu objected to some of the excesses of the Marxists, and he later rejected the ideas of structural Marxism. Although Bourdieu cannot be thought of as a Marxist, there are certainly ideas derived from Marxian theory that run through his work. Most notable is his emphasis on practice (praxis) and his desire to integrate theory and (research) practice in his sociology. (It could be said that instead of existentialism or structuralism, Bourdieu is doing "praxeology.") There is also a liberationist strand in his work in which he can be seen as being interested in freeing people from political and class domination. But, as was the case with Sartre and Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu can best be seen as creating his ideas by using Marx and the Marxists as a point of departure.

There are traces of the influence of other theorists in his work, especially that of Weber and of the leading French sociological theorist, Emile Durkheim. However, Bourdieu resisted being labeled as a Marxian, Weberian, Durkheimian, or anything else. He regarded such labels as limiting, oversimplifying, and doing violence to his work. In a sense, Bourdieu developed his ideas in a critical dialogue that started while he was a student and continued throughout his life: "Everything that I have done in sociology and anthropology I have done as much against what I was taught as thanks to it" (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:204). Bourdieu died January 3, 2002, at the age of 71.

He subscribed, at least in part, to a structuralist perspective, but it is one that is different from the structuralism of Saussure and Lévi-Strauss (as well as the structural Marxists). While they, in turn, focused on structures in language and culture, Bourdieu argued that structures also exist in the social world itself. Bourdieu saw "objective structures [as] independent of the consciousness and will of agents, which are capable of guiding and constraining their practices or their representations" (1989:14). He simultaneously adopted a constructivist position which allowed him to deal with the genesis of schemes of perception, thought, and action as well as that of social structures.

Bourdieu sought to bridge structuralism and constructivism, and succeeded to some degree, but there is a bias in his work in the direction of structuralism. It is for this reason that he (along with Foucault and others—see Chapter 17) is thought of as a poststructuralist. There is more continuity in his work with structuralism than there is with constructivism. Unlike the approach of most others (for example, phenomenologists, symbolic interactionists), Bourdieu's constructivism ignores subjectivity and intentionality. He thought it important to include within his sociology the way people, on the basis of their position in social space, perceive and construct the social world. However, the perception and construction that take place in the social world are both animated and constrained by structures. This is well reflected in one of his own definitions of his theoretical perspective: "The analysis of objective structures . . . is inseparable from the analysis of the genesis, within biological individuals, of the mental structures which are to some extent the product of the incorporation of social structures; inseparable, too, from the analysis of the genesis of these social structures themselves" (Bourdieu, 1990:14). We can describe what he is interested in as the relationship "between social structures and mental structures" (Bourdieu, 1984a:471).

Thus some microsociologists would be uncomfortable with Bourdieu's perspective and would see it as little more than a more adequate structuralism. According to Wacquant, "Although the two moments of analysis are equally necessary, they are not equal: epistemological priority is granted objectivist rupture over subjectivist understanding" (1992:11). As Jenkins puts it, "In his sociological heart of hearts he [Bourdieu] is as committed to an objectivist view of the world as the majority of those whose work he so sternly dismisses" (1992:91). Or conversely, "At the end of the day, perhaps the most crucial weakness in Bourdieu's work is his inability to cope with subjectivity" (Jenkins, 1992:97). Yet there is a dynamic actor in Bourdieu's theory, an actor capable of "*intentionless invention* of regulated improvisation" (1977:79). The heart of Bourdieu's work, and of his effort to bridge subjectivism and objectivism, lies in his concepts of habitus and field (Aldridge, 1998), as well as their dialectical relationship to each other (Swartz, 1997). While habitus exist in the minds of actors, fields exist outside their minds. We will examine these two concepts in some detail over the next few pages.

Habitus We begin with the concept for which Bourdieu is most famous—habitus (Jenkins, 2005b).[8] *Habitus* are the "mental, or cognitive structures" through which

[8] This idea was not created by Bourdieu but is, rather, a traditional philosophical idea that he resuscitated (Wacquant, 1989). The word *habitus* is used as both a plural and a singular noun.

people deal with the social world. People are endowed with a series of internalized schemes through which they perceive, understand, appreciate, and evaluate the social world. It is through such schemes that people both produce their practices and perceive and evaluate them. Dialectically, habitus are "the product of the internalization of the structures" of the social world (Bourdieu, 1989:18). In fact, we can think of habitus as "internalized, 'embodied' social structures" (Bourdieu, 1984a:468). They are something like a "common sense" (Holton, 2000). They reflect objective divisions in the class structure, such as age groups, genders, and social classes. A habitus is acquired as a result of long-term occupation of a position within the social world. Thus habitus varies depending on the nature of one's position in that world; not everyone has the same habitus. However, those who occupy the same position within the social world tend to have similar habitus. (To be fair to Bourdieu, we must report that he made statements such as that his work was guided "by the desire to reintroduce the agent's practice, his or her capacity for invention and improvisation" [Bourdieu, 1990:13].) In this sense, habitus also can be a collective phenomenon. The habitus allows people to make sense out of the social world, but the existence of a multitude of habitus means that the social world and its structures do not impose themselves uniformly on all actors.

The habitus available at any given time have been created over the course of collective history: "The habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history, in accordance with the schemes engendered by history" (Bourdieu, 1977:82). The habitus manifested in any given individual is acquired over the course of individual history and is a function of the particular point in social history in which it occurs. Habitus is both durable and transposable—that is, transferable from one field to another. However, it is possible for people to have an inappropriate habitus, to suffer from what Bourdieu called *hysteresis.* A good example is someone who is uprooted from an agrarian existence in a contemporary precapitalist society and put to work on Wall Street. The habitus acquired in a precapitalist society would not allow one to cope very well with life on Wall Street.

The habitus both produces and is produced by the social world. On the one hand, habitus is a "structuring structure"; that is, it is a structure that structures the social world. On the other hand, it is a "structured structure"; that is, it is a structure that is structured by the social world. In other terms, Bourdieu describes habitus as the *"dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality"* (1977:72). Thus, habitus allowed Bourdieu to escape from having to choose between subjectivism and objectivism, to "escape from under the philosophy of the subject without doing away with the agent . . . as well as from under the philosophy of the structure but without forgetting to take into account the effects it wields upon and through the agent" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:121–122).

It is practice that mediates between habitus and the social world. On the one hand, it is through practice that the habitus is created; on the other hand, it is as a result of practice that the social world is created. Bourdieu expressed the mediating function of practice when he defined the habitus as "the system of structured and structuring dispositions which is constituted by practice and constantly aimed at practical . . . functions" (cited in Wacquant, 1989:42; see also Bourdieu, 1977:72).

While practice tends to shape habitus, habitus, in turn, serves to both unify and generate practice.

Although habitus is an internalized structure that constrains thought and choice of action, it does *not* determine them (Myles, 1999). This lack of determinism is one of the main things that distinguishes Bourdieu's position from that of mainstream structuralists. The habitus merely "suggests" what people should think and what they should choose to do. People engage in a conscious deliberation of options, although this decision-making process reflects the operation of the habitus. The habitus provides the principles by which people make choices and choose the strategies that they will employ in the social world. As Bourdieu and Wacquant picturesquely put it, "people are not fools." However, people are not fully rational either (Bourdieu disdained rational choice theory); they act in a "reasonable" manner—they have practical sense. There is a logic to what people do; it is the "logic of practice" (Bourdieu, 1980/1990).

Robbins underscores the point that practical logic is "'polythetic'—that is to say that practical logic is capable of sustaining simultaneously a multiplicity of confused and logically (in terms of formal logic) contradictory meanings or theses because the overriding context of its operation is practical" (1991:112). This statement is important not only because it underscores the difference between practical logic and rationality (formal logic) but also because it reminds us of Bourdieu's "relationism." The latter is important in this context because it leads us to recognize that habitus is *not* an unchanging, fixed structure, but rather is adapted by individuals who are constantly changing in the face of the contradictory situations in which they find themselves.

The habitus functions "below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny and control by the will" (Bourdieu, 1984a:466). Although we are not conscious of habitus and its operation, it manifests itself in our most practical activities, such as the way we eat, walk, talk, and even blow our noses. The habitus operates as a structure, but people do not simply respond mechanically to it or to external structures that are operating on them. Thus, in Bourdieu's approach we avoid the extremes of unpredictable novelty and total determinism.

Field We turn now to the "field," which Bourdieu thought of relationally rather than structurally. The *field* is a network of relations among the objective positions within it (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:97). These relations exist apart from individual consciousness and will. They are *not* interactions or intersubjective ties among individuals. The occupants of positions may be either agents or institutions, and they are constrained by the structure of the field. There are a number of semiautonomous fields in the social world (for example, artistic [Bourdieu and Darbel, 1969/1990; Fowler, 1997], religious, higher education), all with their own specific logics and all generating among actors a belief about the things that are at stake in a field.

Bourdieu saw the field, by definition, as an arena of battle: "The field is also a field of struggles" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:101). It is the structure of the field that both "undergirds and guides the strategies whereby the occupants of these positions seek, individually or collectively, to safeguard or improve their position, and to impose the principle of hierarchization most favorable to their own products" (Bourdieu, cited in Wacquant, 1989:40). The field is a type of competitive marketplace

in which various kinds of capital (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) are employed and deployed. However, it is the field of power (of politics) that is of the utmost importance; the hierarchy of power relationships within the political field serves to structure all the other fields.

Bourdieu laid out a three-step process for the analysis of a field. The first step, reflecting the primacy of the field of power, is to trace the relationship of any specific field to the political field. The second step is to map the objective structure of the relations among positions within the field. Finally, the analyst should seek to determine the nature of the habitus of the agents who occupy the various types of positions within the field.

The positions of various agents in the field are determined by the amount and relative weight of the capital they possess (Anheier, Gerhards, and Romo, 1995). Bourdieu even used military imagery to describe the field, calling it an arena of "strategic emplacements, fortresses to be defended and captured in a field of struggles" (1984a:244). It is capital that allows one to control one's own fate as well as the fate of others (on the negative aspects of capital, see Portes and Landolt, 1996). Bourdieu usually discussed four types of capital (for a discussion of a slightly different formulation of types of capital applied to the genesis of the state, see Bourdieu, 1994). This idea is, of course, drawn from the economic sphere (Guillory, 2000:32), and the meaning of *economic capital* is obvious. *Cultural capital* "comprises familiarity with and easy use of cultural forms institutionalized [e.g., through the university] at the apex of society's cultural hierarchy" (DiMaggio, 2005:167). *Social capital* consists of valued social relations between people. *Symbolic capital* stems from one's honor and prestige.

Occupants of positions within the field employ a variety of *strategies.* This idea shows, once again, that Bourdieu's actors have at least some freedom: "The habitus does not negate the possibility of *strategic* calculation on the part of agents" (Bourdieu, 1993:5; italics added). However, strategies do not refer "to the purposive and preplanned pursuit of calculated goals . . . but to the active deployment of objectively oriented 'lines of action' that obey regularities and form coherent and socially intelligible patterns, even though they do not follow conscious rules or aim at the premeditated goals posited by a strategist" (Wacquant, 1992:25). It is via strategies that "the occupants of these positions seek, individually or collectively, to safeguard or improve their position and to impose the principle of hierarchization most favorable to their own products. The strategies of agents depend on their positions in the field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:101).

Bourdieu saw the state as the site of the struggle over the monopoly of what he called *symbolic violence.* This is a "soft" form of violence—"violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:167). Symbolic violence is practiced indirectly, largely through cultural mechanisms, and stands in contrast to the more direct forms of social control that sociologists often focus on. The educational system is the major institution through which symbolic violence is practiced on people (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970/1990; for an application of the idea of symbolic violence to the status of women, see Krais, 1993). The language, the meanings, the symbolic system of those in power are imposed on the rest of the population. This serves to buttress the position of those in power

by, among other things, obscuring what they are doing from the rest of society and getting "the dominated [to] accept as legitimate their own condition of domination" (Swartz, 1997:89). More generally, Bourdieu (1996) saw the educational system as deeply implicated in reproducing existing power and class relations. It is in his ideas on symbolic violence that the political aspect of Bourdieu's work is clearest. That is, Bourdieu was interested in the emancipation of people from this violence and, more generally, from class and political domination (Postone, LiPuma, and Calhoun, 1993:6). Yet Bourdieu was no naive utopian; a better description of his position might be "reasoned utopianism" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:197).

In underscoring the importance of *both* habitus and field, Bourdieu rejected the split between methodological individualists and methodological holists and adopted a position that has been termed "methodological relationism" (Ritzer and Gindoff, 1992). That is, Bourdieu was focally concerned with the *relationship* between habitus and field. He saw this as operating in two main ways. On the one hand, the field *conditions* the habitus; on the other hand, the habitus *constitutes* the field as something that is meaningful, that has sense and value, and that is worth the investment of energy.

Applying Habitus and Field

Bourdieu did not simply seek to develop an abstract theoretical system; he also related it to a series of empirical concerns and thereby avoided the trap of pure intellectualism. We will illustrate the application of his theoretical approach in his empirical study *Distinction* (1984a), which examines the aesthetic preferences of different groups throughout society (for another application, see *Homo Academicus* [Bourdieu, 1984b]).

Distinction In this work, Bourdieu attempted, among other things, to demonstrate that culture can be a legitimate object of scientific study. He attempted to reintegrate culture in the sense of "high culture" (for example, preferences for classical music) with the anthropological sense of culture, which looks at all its forms, both high and low. More specifically, in this work Bourdieu linked taste for refined objects with taste for the most basic food flavors.

Because of structural invariants, especially field and habitus, the cultural preferences of the various groups within society (especially classes and fractions of classes) constitute coherent systems. Bourdieu was focally concerned with variations in aesthetic "taste," the acquired disposition to differentiate among the various cultural objects of aesthetic enjoyment and to appreciate them differentially. Taste is also practice that serves, among other things, to give an individual, as well as others, a sense of his or her place in the social order. Taste serves to unify those with similar preferences and to differentiate them from those with different tastes. That is, through the practical applications and implications of taste, people classify objects and thereby, in the process, classify themselves. We are able to categorize people by the tastes they manifest, for example, by their preferences for different types of music or movies. These practices, like all others, need to be seen in the context of all mutual relationships, that is, within the totality. Thus, seemingly isolated tastes for art or movies are related to preferences in food, sports, or hairstyles.

Two interrelated fields are involved in Bourdieu's study of taste—class relationships (especially within fractions of the dominant class) and cultural relationships (for a critique of this distinction, see Erickson, 1996). He saw these fields as a series of positions in which a variety of "games" are undertaken. The actions taken by the agents (individual or collective) who occupy specific positions are governed by the structure of the field, the nature of the positions, and the interests associated with them. However, it is also a game that involves self-positioning and the use of a wide range of strategies to allow one to excel at the game. Taste is an opportunity both to experience and to assert one's position within the field. But the field of social class has a profound effect on one's ability to play this game; those in the higher classes are far better able to have their tastes accepted and to oppose the tastes of those in the lower classes. Thus the world of cultural works is related to the hierarchical world of social class and is itself both hierarchical and hierarchizing.

Needless to say, Bourdieu also linked taste to his other major concept, habitus. Tastes are shaped far more by these deep-rooted and long-standing dispositions than they are by surface opinions and verbalizations. People's preferences for even such mundane aspects of culture as clothing, furniture, and cooking are shaped by the habitus. And it is these dispositions "that forge the unconscious unity of a class" (Bourdieu, 1984a:77). Bourdieu put this more colorfully later: "Taste is a matchmaker . . . through which a habitus confirms its affinity with other habitus" (1984a:243). Dialectically, of course, it is the structure of the class that shapes the habitus.

While both field and habitus were important to Bourdieu, it is their dialectical relationship that is of utmost importance and significance; field and habitus mutually define one another:

> The dispositions constituting the cultivated habitus are only formed, only function and are only valid in a *field,* in the relationship with a field . . . which is itself a 'field of possible forces,' a 'dynamic' situation in which forces are only manifested in their relationship with certain dispositions. This is why the same practices may receive opposite meanings and values in different fields, in different configurations, or in opposing sectors of the same field.
>
> (Bourdieu, 1984a:94; italics added)

Or, as Bourdieu put it, in more general terms: "There is a strong correlation between social positions and the dispositions of the agents who occupy them" (1984a:110). It is out of the relationship between habitus and field that practices, cultural practices in particular, are established.

Bourdieu saw culture as a kind of economy, or marketplace. In this marketplace people utilize cultural rather than economic capital. This capital is largely a result of people's social class origin and their educational experience. In the marketplace, people accrue more or less capital and either expend it to improve their position or lose it, thereby causing their position within the economy to deteriorate.

People pursue distinction in a range of cultural fields—the beverages they drink (Perrier or cola), the automobiles they drive (Mercedes Benz or Ford Escort), the newspapers they read (*The New York Times* or *USA Today*), and the resorts they visit (the French Riviera or Disney World). Relationships of distinction are objectively

inscribed in these products and are reactivated each time they are appropriated. In Bourdieu's view, "The total field of these fields offers well-nighly inexhaustible possibilities for the pursuit of distinction" (1984a:227). The appropriation of certain cultural goods (for example, a Mercedes Benz) yields "profit," whereas that of others (an Escort) yields no gain, or even a "loss."

Bourdieu (1998a:9) took pains to make it clear that he was not simply arguing, following Thorstein Veblen's (1899/1994) famous theory of conspicuous consumption, that the "driving force of all human behavior was the search for distinction." Rather, he contended that his main point "is that to exist within a social space, to occupy a point or to be an individual within a social space, is to differ, to be different . . . being inscribed in the space in question, he or she . . . is endowed with categories of perception, with classificatory schemata, with a certain taste, which permits her to make differences, to discern, to distinguish" (Bourdieu, 1998a:9). Thus, for example, one who chooses to own a grand piano is different from one who opts for an accordion. That one choice (the piano) is worthy of distinction whereas the other (the accordion) is considered vulgar as a result of the dominance of one point of view and the symbolic violence practiced against those who adopt another viewpoint.

There is a dialectic between the nature of cultural products and tastes. Changes in cultural goods lead to alterations in taste, but changes in taste also are likely to result in transformations in cultural products. The structure of the field not only conditions the desires of the consumers of cultural goods but also structures what the producers create in order to satisfy those demands.

Changes in taste (and Bourdieu saw all fields temporally) result from the struggle between opposing forces in both the cultural (the supporters of old versus new fashions, for example) and the class (the dominant versus the dominated fractions within the dominant class) arenas. However, the heart of the struggle lies within the class system, and the cultural struggle between, for example, artists and intellectuals is a reflection of the interminable struggle between the different fractions of the dominant class to define culture, indeed the entire social world. It is oppositions within the class structure that condition oppositions in taste and in habitus. Although Bourdieu placed great importance on social class, he refused to reduce it to merely economic matters or to the relations of production but saw class as defined by habitus as well.

Bourdieu offered a distinctive theory of the relationship between agency and structure within the context of a concern for the dialectical relationship between habitus and field. His theory also is distinguished by its focus on practice (in the preceding case, aesthetic practices) and its refusal to engage in arid intellectualism. In that sense it represents a return to the Marxian concern for the relationship between theory and practice.

Concluding Thoughts Bourdieu was one thinker (another is Garfinkel) who was considered a theorist but who rejected that label. He said that he was not "producing a general discourse on the social world" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:159). Bourdieu rejected pure theory that lacks an empirical base, but he also disdained pure empiricism

performed in a theoretical vacuum. Rather, he saw himself engaged in research that was "inseparably empirical and theoretical . . . research without theory is blind, and theory without research is empty" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:160, 162).

Overall, we find ourselves in accord with Jenkins when he argues that "Bourdieu's intellectual project is longstanding, relatively coherent and cumulative. It amounts to nothing less than an attempt to construct a theory of social practice and society" (1992:67). Calhoun sees Bourdieu as a critical theorist, which in this context is defined more broadly than simply those associated with the Frankfurt school. Calhoun defines critical theory as "the project of social theory that undertakes simultaneously critique of received categories, critique of theoretical practice, and critical substantive analysis of social life in terms of the possible, not just the actual" (1993a:63).

Although Bourdieu offered a theory, his theory does not have universal validity. For example, he said that there are "no transhistoric laws of the relations between fields" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:109). The nature of the actual relations between fields is always an empirical question. Similarly, the nature of habitus changes with altered historical circumstances: "Habitus . . . is a transcendental but a historical transcendental bound up with the structure and history of a field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:189).

Colonization of the Life-World

We discussed Habermas's earlier ideas in Chapter 8, on neo-Marxian theory, in the section titled "Critical Theory." As we will see, Habermas's perspective can still be thought of, at least in part, as being a neo-Marxian orientation (McBride, 2000), but it has broadened considerably and is increasingly difficult to contain within that, or any other, theoretical category. Habermas's theory has grown and become more diverse as Habermas has addressed, and incorporated, the ideas of a wide range of sociological theorists, most recently and most notably those of George Herbert Mead, Talcott Parsons, Alfred Schutz, and Emile Durkheim. In spite of the difficulties involved in categorizing Habermas's innovative theoretical perspective, we will discuss his most recent ideas, which can be broadly thought of as the "colonization of the life-world," under the heading "agency-structure issue." Habermas (1991:251) makes it clear that he is engaging in "paradigm combination"; that is, he is creating his agency-structure perspective by integrating ideas drawn from action theory and systems theory. It is, at least in part, in his thoughts on the life-world that Habermas deals with agency. Structure is dealt with primarily in Habermas's ideas on the social system, which, as we will see, is the force that is colonizing the life-world. What does Habermas mean by *life-world, system,* and *colonization?* We address these phenomena and their interrelationship, as well as other key ideas in Habermas's most recent theorizing, in this section.

Before we get to these concepts, it should be made clear that Habermas's major focus continues to be on communicative action. Free and open communication remains both his theoretical baseline and his political objective. It also has the methodological function, much like Weber's ideal types, of allowing him to analyze variations from the model: "The construction of an unlimited and undistorted discourse can serve at

most as a foil for setting off more glaringly the rather ambiguous developmental tendencies in modern society" (Habermas, 1987a:107). Indeed, his focal interest in the colonization of the life-world is in the ways in which that process is adversely affecting free communication.

Habermas also retains an interest in the Weberian process of rationalization, specifically the issue of the differential rationalization of life-world and system and the impact of this difference on the colonization of the former by the latter (for a somewhat counter view, see Bartos, 1996). In Weberian terms, the *system* is the domain of formal rationality, whereas the *life-world* is the site of substantive rationality. The *colonization of the life-world,* therefore, involves a restatement of the Weberian thesis that in the modern world, formal rationality is triumphing over substantive rationality and coming to dominate areas that formerly were defined by substantive rationality. Thus, while Habermas's theory has taken some interesting new turns, it retains its theoretical roots, especially in its Marxian and Weberian orientations.

The Life-World This concept is derived from phenomenological sociology in general and, more specifically, the theories of Alfred Schutz (Bowring, 1996). But Habermas interprets the ideas of George Herbert Mead as also contributing to insights about the life-world. To Habermas, the life-world represents an internal perspective (whereas, as we will see, the system represents an external viewpoint): "Society is conceived from the perspective of the acting subject" (1987a:117). Thus, there is only one society; life-world and system are simply different ways of looking at it.

Habermas views the life-world and communicative action as "complementary" concepts. More specifically, communicative action can be seen as occurring within the life-world:

> The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world . . . and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements.
>
> (Habermas, 1987a:126)

The life-world is a "context-forming background of processes of reaching understanding" through communicative action (Habermas, 1987a:204). It involves a wide range of unspoken presuppositions about mutual understanding that must exist and be mutually understood for communication to take place.

Habermas is concerned with the rationalization of the life-world, which involves, for one thing, increasingly rational communication in the life-world. He believes that the more rational the life-world becomes, the more likely it is that interaction will be controlled by "rationally motivated mutual understanding." Such understanding, or a rational method of achieving consensus, is based ultimately on the authority of the better argument.

Habermas sees the rationalization of the life-world as involving the progressive differentiation of its various elements. The life-world is composed of culture, society, and personality (note the influence of Parsons and his action systems). Each of these refers to interpretive patterns, or background assumptions, about culture and its effect

on action, appropriate patterns of social relations (society), and what people are like (personality) and how they are supposed to behave. Engaging in communicative action and achieving understanding in terms of each of these themes lead to the reproduction of the life-world through the reinforcement of culture, the integration of society, and the formation of personality. While these components are closely intertwined in archaic societies, the rationalization of the life-world involves the "growing differentiation between culture, society and personality" (Habermas, 1987a:288).

System While the life-world represents the viewpoint of acting subjects on society, system involves an external perspective that views society "from the observer's perspective of someone not involved" (Habermas, 1987a:117). In analyzing systems, we are attuned to the interconnection of actions, as well as the functional significance of actions and their contributions to the maintenance of the system. Each of the major components of the life-world (culture, society, personality) has corresponding elements in the system. Cultural reproduction, social integration, and personality formation take place at the system level.

The system has its roots in the life-world, but ultimately it comes to develop its own structural characteristics. Examples of such structures include the family, the judiciary, the state, and the economy. As these structures evolve, they grow more and more distant from the life-world. As in the life-world, rationalization at the system level involves progressive differentiation and greater complexity. These structures also grow more self-sufficient. As they grow in power, they exercise more and more steering capacity over the life-world. They come to have less and less to do with the process of achieving consensus and, in fact, limit the occurrence of that process in the life-world. In other words, these rational structures, instead of enhancing the capacity to communicate and reach understanding, threaten those processes through the exertion of external control over them.

Social Integration and System Integration Given the preceding discussion of life-world and system, Habermas concludes: "*The fundamental problem of social theory* is how to connect in a satisfactory way the two conceptual strategies indicated by the notions of 'system' and 'lifeworld'" (1987a:151; italics added). Habermas labels those two conceptual strategies "social integration" and "system integration."

The perspective of *social integration* focuses on the life-world and the ways in which the action system is integrated through either normatively guaranteed or communicatively achieved consensus. Theorists who believe that society is integrated through social integration begin with communicative action and see society *as* the life-world. They adopt the internal perspective of the group members, and they employ a hermeneutic approach in order to be able to relate their understanding to that of the members of the life-world. The ongoing reproduction of society is seen as being a result of the actions undertaken by members of the life-world to maintain its symbolic structures. It also is seen only from their perspective. Thus, what is lost in this hermeneutic approach is the outsider's viewpoint as well as a sense of the reproductive processes that are occurring at the system level.

The perspective of *system integration* is focally concerned with the system and the way in which it is integrated through external control over individual decisions that are not subjectively coordinated. Those who adopt this perspective see society as a self-regulating system. They adopt the external perspective of the observer, but this perspective prohibits them from really getting at the structural patterns that can be understood only hermeneutically from the internal perspective of members of the life-world.

Thus, Habermas concludes that although each of these two broad perspectives has something to offer, both have serious limitations. On the basis of his critique of social and system integration, Habermas offers his alternative, which seeks to integrate these two theoretical orientations: he sees

> society as a system that has to fulfill conditions for the maintenance of sociocultural life-worlds. The formula-societies are *systematically stabilized* complexes of action of *socially integrated* groups. . . . [I] stand for the heuristic proposal that we view society as an entity that, in the course of social evolution, gets differentiated *both* as a *system* and a *lifeworld.*
>
> (Habermas, 1987a:151–152; italics added)

Having argued that he is interested in *both* system and life-world, Habermas makes it clear at the end of the above quotation that he is also concerned with the evolution of the two. Although both evolve in the direction of increasing rationalization, that rationalization takes different forms in life-world and system, and that differentiation is the basis of the colonization of the life-world.

Colonization Crucial to the understanding of the idea of colonization is the fact that Habermas sees society as being composed of *both* life-world and system. Furthermore, while both concepts were closely intertwined in earlier history, today there is an increasing divergence between them; they have become "decoupled." Although both have undergone the process of rationalization, that process has taken different forms in the two settings. Although Habermas sees a dialectical relationship between system and life-world (they both limit and open up new possibilities for each other), his main concern is with the way in which system in the modern world has come to control the life-world. In other words, he is interested in the breakdown of the dialectic between system and life-world and the growing power of the former over the latter.[9]

Habermas contrasts the increasing rationality of system and life-world. The rationalization of the life-world involves growth in the rationality of communicative action. Furthermore, action that is oriented toward achieving mutual understanding is increasingly freed from normative constraint and relies more and more on everyday language. In other words, social integration is achieved more and more through the processes of consensus formation in language.

But the result of this is the fact that the demands on language grow and come to overwhelm its capacities. Delinguistified media (especially money in the economic

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[9] However, Habermas also sees problems (domination, self-deception) *within* the life-world (Outhwaite, 1994:116).

system and power in the political system and its administrative apparatus)—having become differentiated in, and emanating from, the system—come to fill the void and replace, to at least some degree, everyday language. Instead of language coordinating action, it is money and power that perform that function. Life becomes monetarized and bureaucratized.

More generally, the increasingly complex system "unleashes system imperatives that burst the capacity of the lifeworld they instrumentalize" (Habermas, 1987a:155). Thus, Habermas writes of the "violence" exercised over the life-world by the system through the ways in which it restricts communication. This violence, in turn, produces "pathologies" within the life-world. Habermas embeds this development within a view of the history of the world:

> The far-reaching uncoupling of system and lifeworld was a necessary condition for the transition from the stratified class societies of European feudalism to the economic class societies of the early modern period; but the capitalist pattern of modernization is marked by a *deformation,* a reification of the symbolic structures of the lifeworld under the imperatives of subsystems differentiated out via money and power and rendered self-sufficient.
>
> (Habermas, 1987a:283; italics added)

It might be noted that by linking the deformities to capitalism, Habermas continues, at least in this sense, to operate within a neo-Marxian framework. However, when he looks at the modern world, Habermas is forced to abandon a Marxian approach (Sitton, 1996), because he concludes that the deformation of the life-world is "no longer localizable in any class-specific ways" (1987a:333). Given this limitation, and in line with his roots in critical theory, Habermas demonstrates that his work also is strongly influenced by Weberian theory. In fact, he argues that the distinction between life-world and system, along with the ultimate colonization of the life-world, allows us to see in a new light the Weberian thesis "of a modernity at variance with itself" (Habermas, 1987a:299). In Weber, this conflict exists primarily between substantive and formal rationality and the triumph in the West of the latter over the former. To Habermas, the rationalization of the system comes to triumph over the rationalization of the life-world, with the result that the life-world comes to be colonized by the system.

Habermas adds specificity to his thoughts on colonization by arguing that the main forces in the process are "formally organized domains of action" at the system level, such as the economy and the state. In traditional Marxian terms, Habermas sees modern society as subject to recurrent systemic crises. In seeking to deal with these crises, institutions such as the state and the economy undertake actions that adversely affect the life-world, leading to pathologies and crises within it. Basically, the life-world comes to be denuded by these systems, and communicative action comes to be less and less directed toward the achievement of consensus. Communication becomes increasingly rigidified, impoverished, and fragmented, and the life-world itself seems poised on the brink of dissolution. This assault on the life-world worries Habermas greatly, given his concern for the communicative action that takes place within it. However, no matter how extensive the colonization by the system, the life-world is "never completely husked away" (Habermas, 1987a:311).

If the essential problem in the modern world is the uncoupling of system and life-world and the domination of the life-world by the system, the solutions are clear-cut. On the one hand, life-world and system need to be recoupled. On the other hand, the dialectic between system and life-world needs to be reinstated so that instead of the latter being deformed by the former, the two become mutually enriching and enhancing. While the two were intertwined in primitive society, the rationalization process that has occurred in both system and life-world makes it possible that the future recoupling will produce a level of system, life-world, and their interrelationship unprecedented in human history.

Thus, once again, Habermas is back to his Marxian roots. Marx, of course, did not look back in history for the ideal state but saw it in the future in the form of communism and the full flowering of species-being. Habermas, too, does not look back to archaic societies where nonrationalized system and life-world were more unified but looks to a future state involving the far more satisfactory unification of rationalized system and life-world.

Habermas also reinterprets the Marxian theory of basic struggles within society. Marx, of course, emphasized the conflict between proletariat and capitalist and traced it to the exploitative character of the capitalist system. Habermas focuses not on exploitation but on colonization and sees many of the struggles of recent decades in this light. That is, he sees social movements such as those oriented to greater equality, increased self-realization, the preservation of the environment, and peace "as reactions to system assaults on the lifeworld. Despite the diversity of interests and political projects of these heterogeneous groups, they have resisted the colonization of the lifeworld" (Seidman, 1989:25). The hope for the future clearly lies in resistance to the encroachments on the life-world and in the creation of a world in which system and life-world are in harmony and serve to mutually enrich one another to a historically unprecedented degree.

Major Differences in the Agency-Structure Literature

As is the case with work on micro-macro integration in the United States, there are significant differences among Europeans working on the agency-structure issue. For example, there is considerable disagreement in the literature on the nature of the agent. Most of those working in this realm (for example, Giddens, Bourdieu) tend to treat the agent as an individual actor, but Touraine's "actionalist sociology" treats collectivities such as social classes as agents. In fact, Touraine defines *agency* as "an organization directly implementing one or more elements of the system of historical action and therefore intervening directly in the relations of social domination" (1977:459). A third, middle-ground position on this issue is taken by Burns and Flam (see also Crozier and Friedberg, 1980), who regard either individuals or collectivities as agents.

There is considerable disagreement even among those who focus on the individual actor as agent. For example, Bourdieu's agent, dominated by habitus, seems far more mechanical than Giddens's (or Habermas's) agent. Bourdieu's habitus involves "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions,* structuring structures, that is,

as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations" (1977:72). The habitus is a source of strategies "without being the product of a genuine strategic intention" (Bourdieu, 1977:73). It is neither subjectivistic nor objectivistic but combines elements of both. It clearly rejects the idea of an actor with "the free and willful power to constitute" (Bourdieu, 1977:73). Giddens's agents may not have intentionality and free will either, but they have much more willful power than do Bourdieu's. Where Bourdieu's agents seem to be dominated by their habitus, by internal ("structuring") structures, the agents in Giddens's work are the perpetrators of action. They have at least some choice, at least the possibility of acting differently than they do. They have power, and they make a difference in their worlds (see also Lukes, 1977). Most important, they constitute (and are constituted by) structures. In contrast, in Bourdieu's work a sometimes seemingly disembodied habitus is involved in a dialectic with the external world.[10]

Similarly, there are marked disagreements among agency-structure theorists on precisely what they mean by structure.[11] Some adopt a specific structure as central, such as the organization in the work of Crozier and Friedberg and Touraine's relations of social domination as found in political institutions and organizations; others (for example, Burns, 1986:13) focus on an array of social structures, such as bureaucracy, the polity, the economy, and religion. Giddens offers a very idiosyncratic definition of *structure* ("recursively organized sets of rules and resources" [1984:25]) that is at odds with virtually every other definition in the literature (Layder, 1985). However, his definition of *systems* as reproduced social practices is very close to what many sociologists mean by structure. In addition to the differences among those working with structure, differences exist between these theorists and others.

The attempts at agency-structure linkage flow from a variety of very different theoretical directions. For example, within social theory Giddens seems to be animated by functionalism and structuralism versus phenomenology, existentialism, and ethnomethodology and, more generally, by new linguistic structuralism, semiotics, and hermeneutics (Archer, 1982). Bourdieu seeks to find a satisfactory alternative to subjectivism and objectivism in anthropological theory. Habermas seeks to synthesize ideas derived from Marx, Weber, critical theorists, Durkheim, Mead, Schutz, and Parsons.

There is a strain toward either the agency or the structural direction in Europe. Certainly Bourdieu is pulling strongly in the direction of structure, while Giddens has a more powerful sense of agency than do most other theorists of this genre (Layder, 1985:131). In spite of the existence of pulls in the directions of agency and structure, what is distinctive about the European work on agency and structure, compared with American micro-macro work, is a much stronger sense of the need to refuse to separate the two and to deal with them dialectically (for example, Giddens, Bourdieu, Habermas). In the American micro-macro literature, one parallel to the European

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[10] Although we are emphasizing the differences between Giddens and Bourdieu on agency, Giddens (1979:217) sees at least some similarities between the two perspectives.

[11] I am focusing here mainly on Europeans who deal with social structure and not those who see structure as hidden, underlying elements of culture.

efforts to deal with agency and structure dialectically is my attempt to deal dialectically with the integration of the micro-macro and objective-subjective continua.

Dietz and Burns (1992) have made an effort to offer a view of agency and structure that reflects the strengths and weaknesses of earlier work. Four criteria must be met in order for agency to be attributed to a social actor.[12] First, the actor must have power; the actor must be able to make a difference. Second, the actions undertaken by an agent must be intentional. Third, the actor must have some choice, some free play. The result is that observers can make only probabilistic statements about what actors may do. Finally, agents must be reflexive, monitoring the effects of their actions and using that knowledge to modify the bases of action. Overall, agency is viewed as a continuum; all actors have agency to some degree, and no actor has full, unconstrained agency.

The other, structural side of the equation, from Dietz and Burns's point of view, consists of the constraints on agency. First, even if an agent can imagine certain actions, they simply may not be possible, given technological and physical realities. Second, structure (especially rules) makes certain actions seem necessary while others appear impossible. Finally, agency is limited by other agents who have sanctioning power, both positive and negative.

Agency-Structure and Micro-Macro Linkages: Fundamental Differences

One of the central differences between American and European theorists lies in their images of the actor. What is distinctive about American theory is the much greater influence of behaviorism as well as of exchange theory, which is derived, in part, from a behavioristic perspective. Thus, American theorists share the interest of (some) Europeans in conscious, creative action, but it is limited by a recognition of the importance of mindless behavior. This tendency to see the actor as behaving mindlessly is being enhanced now by the growing interest in rational choice theory in American sociology. The image here is of an actor more or less automatically choosing the most efficient means to ends.[13] The influence of rational choice theory in the United States promises to drive an even greater wedge between European and American conceptions of action and agency.

At the macro/structure level, Europeans have been inclined to focus on social structure. In cases where there has not been a single-minded focus on it, social structure has not been differentiated adequately from culture. (Indeed, this is the motivation behind Archer's [1988] work.) In contrast, there has been a much greater tendency in the United States to deal with *both* structure and culture in efforts aimed at micro-macro integration.

Another difference in the macro/structure issue stems from differences in theoretical influence in the United States and Europe. In the United States, the main

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[12] Like most other agency-structure theorists, Dietz and Burns downplay or ignore the agent's body (see Shilling and Mellor, 1996; Shilling, 1997).

[13] DeVille (1989) sees such an actor as robotlike.

influence on thinking on the macro/structure issue has been structural functionalism. The nature of that theory has led American theorists to focus on both large-scale social structures *and* culture. In Europe, the main influence has been structuralism, which has a much more wide-ranging sense of structures, extending all the way from micro structures of the mind to macro structures of society. Culture has been of far less importance to structuralists than to structural functionalists.

Another key difference is the fact that the micro-macro issue is subsumable under the broader issue of levels of analysis (Edel, 1959; Jaffee, 1998; Ritzer, 1981a, 1989; Wiley, 1988), whereas the concern for agency and structure is not. We can clearly think of the micro-macro linkage in terms of some sort of vertical hierarchy, with micro-level phenomena on the bottom, macro-level phenomena at the top, and meso-level entities in between. The agency-structure linkage seems to have no clear connection to the levels-of-analysis issue, because both agency and structure can be found at any level of social analysis.

The agency-structure issue is much more firmly embedded in a historical, dynamic framework than is the micro-macro issue (Sztompka, 1991; again Elias is a clear exception, but of course he is European). In contrast, theorists who deal with micro-macro issues are more likely to depict them in static, hierarchical, ahistorical terms. Nevertheless, at least some of those who choose to depict the micro-macro relationship rather statically make it clear that they understand the dynamic character of the relationship: "The study of levels of social reality and their interrelationship is inherently a *dynamic* rather than a static approach to the social world. . . . A dynamic and historical orientation to the study of levels of the social world can be seen as integral parts of a more general *dialectical* approach" (Ritzer, 1981a:208; see also Wiley, 1988:260). Finally, morality is a central issue to agency-structure theorists but is largely ignored in the micro-macro literature. Agency-structure theory has much more powerful roots in, and a stronger orientation to, philosophy, including its great concern with moral issues. In contrast, micro-macro theory is largely indigenous to sociology and is oriented to the hard sciences as a reference group—areas where moral issues are of far less concern than they are in philosophy.

Summary

The focus in the first part of this chapter is micro-macro integration. This development represents a return to the concerns of the early giants of sociological theory and a move away from the theoretical extremism, either micro or macro, that characterized much of twentieth-century American sociological theory. Little attention was given to the micro-macro issue prior to the 1980s, but during that decade and through the 1990s interest in the topic exploded. The works came from both the micro and the macro extremes as well as various points between them. Some of this work focused on integrating micro and macro theories; the rest was concerned with the linkage between micro and macro levels of social analysis. In addition to this basic difference, there are important differences among those working on integrating theories and levels.

The heart of the first part of this chapter is a discussion of several major examples of work integrating micro and macro levels of social analysis. Two works, those by Alexander and me, develop very similar micro-macro models of the social world. Although there are important differences between these works, their similar images of the social world reflect considerable consensus among those seeking to link micro and macro levels of social analysis. Collins's effort at micro-macro integration is discussed and criticized for its micro reductionism—its tendency to reduce macro phenomena to micro phenomena.

The micro-macro section closes with a detailed examination of the work of one of the European precursors of American work on micro-macro integration—Norbert Elias. Of particular relevance are his thoughts on figurational sociology, as well as his historical-comparative study of the relationship between micro-level manners and macro-level changes in the court and the state.

The second part of this chapter deals with the largely European literature on the agency-structure linkage. This literature has a number of similarities to the American work on micro-macro integration, but there are a number of substantial differences.

Although a large number of contemporary European theorists are dealing with the agency-structure relationship, the bulk of the second part of this chapter is devoted to the work of three major examples of this type of theorizing. The first is Giddens's structuration theory. The core of Giddens's theory is his refusal to treat agents and structures apart from one another; they are seen as being mutually constitutive. We then turn to Bourdieu's theory, which focuses primarily on the relationship between habitus and field. Finally, we analyze Habermas's recent ideas on life-world and system and the colonization of the life-world by the system.

Following a discussion of these specific agency-structure works, we return to a more general treatment of this literature. We begin with a discussion of major differences in this literature, including differing views on the nature of the agent and structure. Another source of difference is the varying theoretical traditions on which these works are based. Some of these works strain in the direction of agency; others pull in the direction of structure.

The next issue is the similarities between the agency-structure and micro-macro literatures. Both literatures share an interest in integration and are wary of the excesses of micro/agency and macro/structural theories. There are, however, far more differences than similarities between these literatures. There are differences in their images of the actor, the ways in which structure is conceived, the theories from which their ideas are derived, the degree to which they may be subsumed under the idea of levels of analysis, the extent to which they are embedded in a historical, dynamic framework, and the degree to which they are concerned with moral issues.