

Modern Sociological Theory: The Major Schools

A Historical Sketch of Sociological Theory: The Later Years

Chapter Outline

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It is difficult to give a precise date for the founding of sociology in the United States. A course in social problems was taught at Oberlin as early as 1858, Comte's term *sociology* was used by George Fitzhugh in 1854, and William Graham Sumner taught social science courses at Yale beginning in 1873. During the 1880s, courses specifically bearing the title "Sociology" began to appear. The first department with *sociology* in its name was founded at the University of Kansas in 1889. In 1892, Albion Small moved to the University of Chicago and set up the new department of sociology. The Chicago department became the first important center of American sociology in general and of sociological theory in particular (Matthews, 1977).

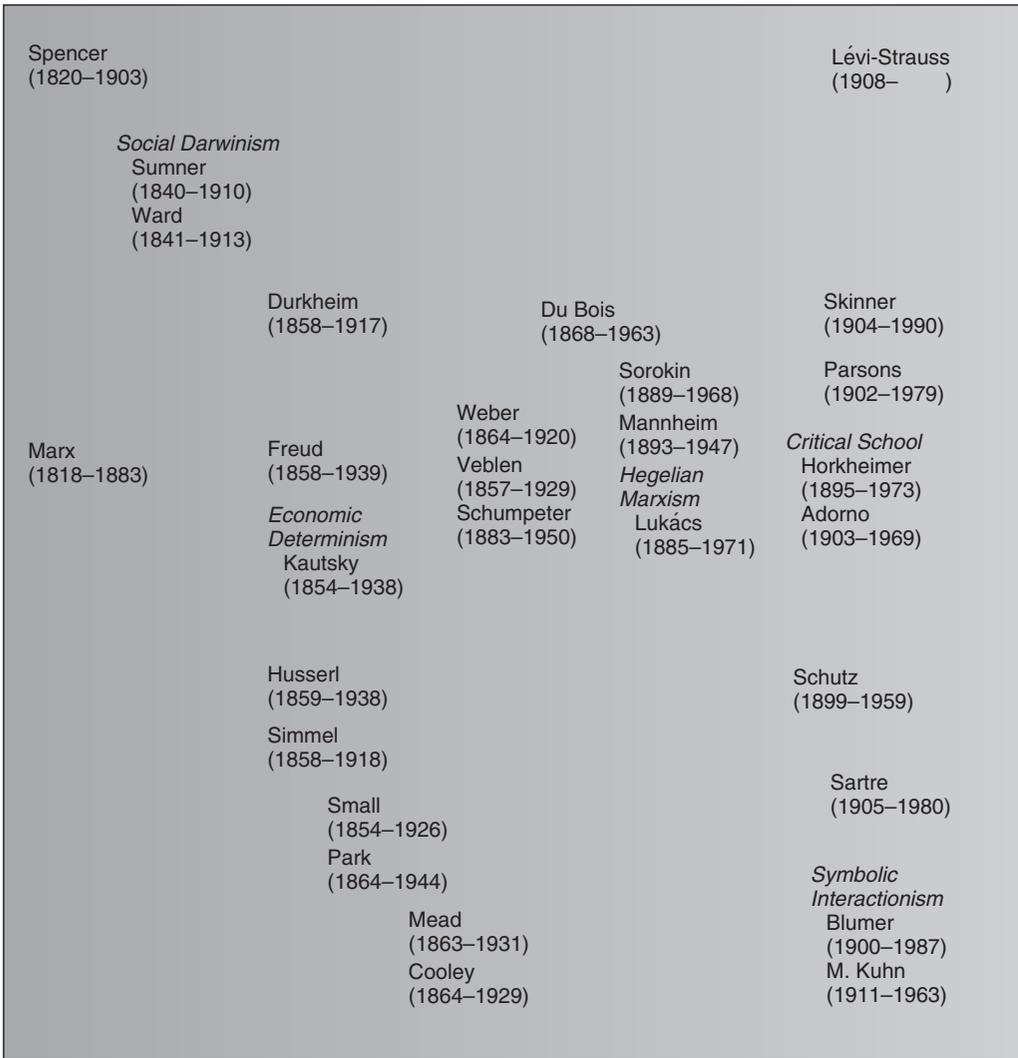


FIGURE 6.1 *Sociological Theory: The Later Years*

Early American Sociological Theory

Politics

Schwendinger and Schwendinger (1974) argue that the early American sociologists are best described as political liberals and not, as was true of most early European theorists, as conservatives. The liberalism characteristic of early American sociology had two basic elements. First, it operated with a belief in the freedom and welfare of the individual. In this belief, it was influenced far more by Spencer’s orientation than by Comte’s more collective position. Second, many sociologists associated with this

<i>Structuralism</i>	<i>Poststructuralism</i> Foucault (1926–1984) Agamben (1942–)	<i>Actor-Network Theory</i> Latour (1947–)
	<i>Exchange Theory</i> Blau (1918–2002) Emerson (1925–1982)	<i>Network Theory</i> <i>Rational Choice Theory</i> Coleman (1926–1995)
Homans (1910–1989)		<i>Postmodern Social Theory</i> Baudrillard (1929–2007)
<i>Structural Functionalism</i> Merton (1910–2003)	<i>Neofunctionalism</i> Alexander (1947–)	<i>Systems Theory</i> Luhmann (1927–1998)
<i>Radical Sociology</i> Mills (1916–1962)	<i>Conflict Theory</i> Dahrendorf (1929–2009)	<i>Spatial Marxism</i> <i>Micro-Macro and Agency Structure Integration Theory</i>
<i>Structural Marxism</i> Althusser (1918–1990)	<i>Feminist Sociological Theory</i>	<i>Theories of Consumption</i>
<i>Economic Marxism</i> Sweezy (1910–) Braverman (1920–1976)	Habermas (1929–) Honneth (1949–)	<i>Synthetic Theory</i> <i>Multiculturalism</i>
<i>Historical Marxism</i> Wallerstein (1930–)	<i>Phenomenological Sociology</i> Berger (1929–) Luckmann (1927–)	<i>Theories of Modernity</i> Giddens (1938–) Bauman (1925–)
	<i>Ethnomethodology</i> Garfinkel (1929–)	<i>Globalization Theory</i> Robertson (1938–)
	<i>Existential Sociology</i> Goffman (1922–1982)	

orientation adopted an evolutionary view of social progress (W. Fine, 1979). However, they were split over how best to bring about this progress. Some argued that steps should be taken by the government to aid social reform, whereas others pushed a laissez-faire doctrine, arguing that the various components of society should be left to solve their own problems.

Liberalism, taken to its extreme, comes very close to conservatism. The belief in social progress—in reform or a laissez-faire doctrine—and the belief in the importance of the individual both lead to positions supportive of the system as a whole. The overriding belief is that the social system works or can be reformed to work. There is little criticism of the system as a whole; in the American case this means,

in particular, that there is little questioning of capitalism. Instead of imminent class struggle, the early sociologists saw a future of class harmony and class cooperation. Ultimately this meant that early American sociological theory helped rationalize exploitation, domestic and international imperialism, and social inequality (Schwendinger and Schwendinger, 1974). In the end, the political liberalism of the early sociologists had enormously conservative implications.

Social Change and Intellectual Currents

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

Arthur Vidich and Stanford Lyman (1985) make a strong case for the influence of Christianity, especially Protestantism, on the founding of American sociology. American sociologists retained the Protestant interest in saving the world and merely substituted one language (science) for another (religion). "From 1854, when the first works in sociology appeared in the United States, until the outbreak of World War I, sociology was a moral and intellectual response to the problems of American life and thought, institutions, and creeds" (Vidich and Lyman, 1985:1). Sociologists sought to define, study, and help solve these social problems. While the clergyman worked within religion to help improve it and people's lot within it, the sociologist did the same thing within society. Given their religious roots, and the religious parallels, the vast majority of sociologists did not challenge the basic legitimacy of society.

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

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

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

Herbert Spencer's Influence on Sociology

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

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

By the 1930s, however, Spencer was in eclipse in the intellectual world in general, as well as in sociology. His Social Darwinist, laissez-faire ideas seemed ridiculous in the light of massive social problems, a world war, and a major economic depression. In 1937 Talcott Parsons announced Spencer's intellectual death for sociology when he echoed the historian Crane Brinton's words of a few years earlier, "Who now reads Spencer?" Today Spencer is of little more than historical interest, but his ideas *were* important in shaping early American sociological theory. Let us look briefly at the work of two American theorists who were influenced, at least in part, by Spencer's work.

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

Sumner was the major exponent of Social Darwinism in the United States, although he appeared to change his view late in life (Delaney, 2005b; Dickens, 2005;

N. Smith, 1979; Weiler, 2007a, 2007b). The following exchange between Sumner and one of his students illustrates his “liberal” views on the need for individual freedom and his position against government interference:

“Professor, don’t you believe in any government aid to industries?”

“No! It’s root, hog, or die.”

“Yes, but hasn’t the hog got a right to root?”

“There are no rights. The world owes nobody a living.”

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

“That’s the only sound economic system. All others are fallacies.”

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

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

(Phelps, cited in Hofstadter, 1959:54)

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

Sumner is of little more than historical interest for two main reasons. First, his orientation and Social Darwinism in general have come to be regarded as little more than a crude legitimation of competitive capitalism and the status quo. Second, he failed to establish a solid enough base at Yale to build a school of sociology with many disciples. That kind of success was to occur some years later at the University of Chicago (Heyl and Heyl, 1976). In spite of success in his time, “Sumner is remembered by few today” (Curtis, 1981:146).

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

Ward, like Sumner, accepted the idea that people had evolved from lower forms to their present status. He believed that early society was characterized by its simplicity and its moral poverty, whereas modern society was more complex, was

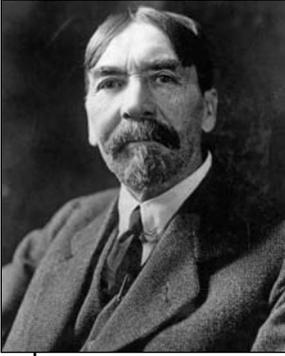
happier, and offered greater freedom. One task of sociology, *pure sociology*, was to study the basic laws of social change and social structure. But Ward was not content simply to have sociologists study social life. He believed that sociology should have a practical side; there should also be an *applied sociology*. This applied sociology involved the conscious use of scientific knowledge to attain a better society. Thus, Ward was not an extreme Social Darwinist; he believed in the need for and importance of social reform.

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

Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929)

Veblen, who was not a sociologist but mainly held positions in economics departments and even in economics was a marginal figure, nonetheless produced a body of social theory that is of enduring significance to those in a number of disciplines, including sociology (Powers, 2004a, 2004b). The central problem for Veblen was the clash between “business” and “industry.” By business, Veblen meant the owners, leaders, “captains” of industry who focused on the profits of their own companies but, to keep prices and profits high, often engaged in efforts to limit production. In so doing they obstructed the operation of the industrial system and adversely affected society as a whole (through higher rates of unemployment, for example), which is best served by the unimpeded operation of industry. Thus, business leaders were the source of many problems within society, which, Veblen felt, should be led by people (e.g., engineers) who understood the industrial system and its operation and were interested in the general welfare.

Most of Veblen’s importance today is traceable to his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899/1994; Varul, 2007). Veblen is critical of the leisure class (which is closely tied to business) for its role in fostering wasteful consumption. To impress the rest of society, the leisure class engaged in both “conspicuous leisure” (the non-productive use of time) and “conspicuous consumption” (spending more money on goods than they are worth). People in all other social classes are influenced by this example and seek, directly and indirectly, to emulate the leisure class. The result is a society characterized by the waste of time and money. What is of utmost importance about this work is that unlike most other sociological works of the time (as well as most of Veblen’s other works), *The Theory of the Leisure Class* focuses on consumption rather than production. Thus, it anticipated the current shift in social theory away from a focus on production and toward a focus on consumption (Slater, 1997; Ritzer, 2005a; Ritzer, Goodman, and Wiedenhof, 2001; also a journal—*Journal of Consumer Culture*—began publication in 2001).



THORSTEIN VEBLEN

A Biographical Sketch

Thorstein Veblen was born in rural Wisconsin on July 30, 1857. His parents were poor farmers of Norwegian origin (Dorfman, 1966). Thorstein was the sixth of twelve children. He was able to escape the farm and at the age of 17 began studying at Carleton College in Northfield,

Minnesota. Early in his schooling he demonstrated both the bitterness and the sense of humor that were to characterize his later work. He met his future first wife, niece of the president of Carleton College, at the school (they eventually married in 1888). Veblen graduated in 1880 and obtained a teaching position, but the school soon closed and he went east to study philosophy at Johns Hopkins University. However, he failed to obtain a scholarship and moved on to Yale in the hopes of finding economic support for his studies. He managed to get by economically and obtained his Ph.D. from Yale in 1884 (one of his teachers was an early giant of sociology, William Graham Sumner). However, in spite of strong letters of recommendation, he was unable to obtain a university position because, at least in part, of his agnosticism, his lack (at the time) of a professional reputation, and the fact that he was perceived as an immigrant lacking the polish needed to hold a university post. He was idle for the next few years (he attributed this idleness to ill health), but by 1891 he returned to his studies, this time focusing more on the social sciences at Cornell University. With the help of one of his professors of economics (A. Laurence Laughlin) who was moving to the University of Chicago, Veblen was able to become a fellow at that university in 1892. He did much of the editorial work associated with *The Journal of Political Economy*, one of the many new academic journals created during this period at Chicago. Veblen was a marginal figure at Chicago, but he did teach some courses and, more important, used the *Journal of Political Economy* as an outlet for his writings. His work also began to appear in other outlets, including *The American Journal of Sociology*, another of the University of Chicago's new journals.

In 1899 he published his first and what became his best-known book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, but his position at Chicago remained tenuous. In fact, when he asked for a customary raise of a few hundred dollars, the university president made it clear that he would not be displeased if Veblen left the university. However, the book received a great deal of attention, and Veblen was eventually promoted to the position of assistant professor. Although some students found his teaching inspiring, most found it abysmal. One of his Chicago students said that he was " 'an exceedingly queer fish . . . Very commonly with his cheek in hand, or in some such position, he talked in a low, placid monotone, in itself a most uninteresting delivery and manner of conducting the class' " (Dorfman, 1966:248-249). It was not unusual for him to begin a course with a large number of students who had heard of his growing fame, but for the class to dwindle to a few diehards by the end of the semester.

Veblen's days at Chicago were numbered for various reasons, including the fact that his marriage was crumbling and he offended Victorian sentiments with affairs

with other women. In 1906 Veblen took an associate professorship at Stanford University. Unlike the situation at Chicago, he taught mainly undergraduates at Stanford, and many of them were put off by his appearance (one said he looked like a “tramp”) and his boring teaching style. What did Veblen do once again was his womanizing, which forced him to resign from Stanford in 1909 under circumstances that made it difficult for him to find another academic position. But with help of a colleague and friend who was the head of the department of economics at the University of Missouri, Veblen was able to obtain a position there in 1911. He also obtained a divorce in that year, and in 1914 married a divorcee and former student.

Veblen’s appointment at Missouri was at a lower rank (lecturer) and paid less than the position at Stanford. In addition, he hated the then-small town, Columbia, Missouri, that was the home of the university (he reportedly called it a “woodpecker hole of a town” and the state a “rotten stump” [Dorfman, 1966:306]). However, it was during his stay at Missouri that another of his best-known books, *The Instinct of Workmanship and the State of the Industrial Arts* appeared (1914).

Veblen’s stormy academic career took another turn in 1917 when he moved to Washington, D.C. to work with a group commissioned by President Woodrow Wilson to analyze possible peace settlements for World War I. After working for the U.S. Food Administration for a short time, Veblen moved to New York City as one of the editors of a magazine, *The Dial*. The magazine shifted its orientation, and within a year Veblen lost his editorial position. However, in the interim he had become connected with the New School for Social Research. His pay there was comparatively high (a good portion of it contributed by one of his former students at Chicago), and because he lived frugally, the great critic of American business began investing his money, at first in raisin vineyards in California and later in the stock market.

Veblen returned to California in 1926, and by the next year he was living in a town shack in northern California. His economic situation became a disaster as he lost the money he had invested in the raisin industry and his stocks became worthless. He continued to earn \$500 to \$600 a year from royalties, and his former Chicago student continued to send him \$500 a year.

Veblen was, to put it mildly, an unusual man. For example, he often could sit for hours and contribute little or nothing to a conversation going on around him. His friends and admirers made it possible for him to become president of the American Economic Association, but he declined the offer. The following vignette offered by a bookseller gives a bit more sense of this complex man:

a man used to appear every six or eight weeks quite regularly, an ascetic, mysterious person . . . with a gentle air. He wore his hair long . . . I used to try to interest him in economics . . . I even once tried to get him to begin with *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. I explained to him what a brilliant port of entry it is to social consciousness . . . He listened attentively to all I said and melted like a snow drop through the door. One day he ordered a volume of Latin hymns. “I shall have to take your name because we will order this expressly for you,” I told him. “We shall not have an audience for such a book as this again in a long time, I am afraid.” “My name is Thorstein Veblen,” he breathed rather than said.

(cited in Tilman, 1992:9–10)

Thorstein Veblen died on August 3, 1929, just before the Great Depression that many felt his work anticipated (Powers, 2005b).



JOSEPH SCHUMPETER

A Biographical Sketch

Born and educated in Austria-Hungary, Joseph Schumpeter's life was filled with a mixture of success, paradox, and tragedy. He received his Ph.D. in 1906 from the University of Vienna and, after practicing law in Egypt for a year, earned early success as a promising young economist. However, his academic career was interrupted by World War I. He served as Minister of Finance in Austria's only *socialist* government between World War I and World War II, and later became president of a bank. The bank collapsed in 1924 when the Vienna stock market crashed, bankrupting Schumpeter. In spite of this personal disaster, Schumpeter gained invaluable practical insight into capitalism and its ever-present "gales." He took a position at the University of Bonn (Germany) in 1925 but began visiting Harvard in the late 1920s, and with the rise of Nazism in Germany, he moved to Harvard on a permanent basis in 1932. He taught there until his death in 1950.

Schumpeter carried himself in an aristocratic manner with much time and effort devoted to his appearance and dress (he told the wife of one colleague that it takes him an hour to get dressed in the morning) (Allen 1991a: 134). He also liked to tell his students that as a young man he had three ambitions in life: to be the world's greatest economist, the world's greatest horseman, and the world's greatest lover (Swedberg 1991: 12). But despite all of his bravado and his escapades, Schumpeter's personal life was also filled with tragedy. It appears that Schumpeter had two great loves in his life. The first was his mother, who doted on him and took great pains to ensure that he had a proper upbringing even to the point of marrying a minor noble to ensure that Schumpeter could attend the best schools (Allen 1991a: 18). The other was his second wife, whom Schumpeter married in 1925. In June of 1926 Schumpeter's mother died; in August of the same year so, too, did his wife and son during childbirth. Although Schumpeter was able to recover from these tragedies, he often characterized his life as one of peace but not joy (Allen 1991b). In the fall of 1926 he began recopying his dead wife's diary, eventually inserting his own comments and contemporary thoughts into it. Schumpeter also began to elevate his dead wife and mother into his own personal deities from whom he would ask for advice and protection (Allen 1991a: 225-9).

Known primarily as an economist, Schumpeter was a multidisciplinary thinker who "knew that law, mathematics, and history mattered mightily, as did the newer fields of *sociology*, *psychology*, and *political science*" (McCraw, 2007:55; italics added). Integrating insights from various disciplines, and focusing on the big economic issues of his day, Schumpeter, like many of the other theorists dealt with in this book, "was following a long European tradition aimed at constructing *grand social theory*" (McCraw, 2007:156).

Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950)

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

The Chicago School¹

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

Early Chicago Sociology

The early Chicago department had several distinctive characteristics. For one thing, it had a strong connection with religion. Some members were ministers themselves, and others were sons of ministers. Small, for example, believed that “the ultimate goal of sociology must be essentially Christian” (Matthews, 1977:95). This opinion led to a view that sociology must be interested in social reform, and this view was combined with a belief that sociology should be scientific.² Scientific sociology with an objective of social amelioration was to be practiced in the burgeoning city of Chicago, which was beset by the positive and negative effects of urbanization and industrialization.

W. I. Thomas (1863–1947) In 1895, W. I. Thomas became a fellow at the Chicago department, where he wrote his dissertation in 1896 (T. McCarthy, 2005). Thomas’s lasting significance was in his emphasis on the need to do scientific research on

¹ See Bulmer (1985) for a discussion of what defines a school and why we can speak of the “Chicago school.”

Tiryakian (1979, 1986) also deals with schools in general, and the Chicago school in particular, and emphasizes the role played by charismatic leaders as well as methodological innovations. For a discussion of this school within the broader context of developments in American sociological theory, see Hinkle (1994).

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

sociological issues (Lodge, 1986). Although he championed this position for many years, its major statement came in 1918 with the publication of *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, which Thomas coauthored with Florian Znaniecki (Halas, 2005; Stebbins, 2007a, 2007b; Wiley, 2007). Martin Bulmer sees it as a landmark study because it moved sociology away from “abstract theory and library research and toward the study of the empirical world utilizing a theoretical framework” (1984:45). Norbert Wiley sees *The Polish Peasant* as crucial to the founding of sociology in the sense of “clarifying the unique intellectual space into which this discipline alone could see and explore” (1986:20). The book was the product of eight years of research in both Europe and the United States and was primarily a study of social disorganization among Polish migrants. The data were of little lasting importance. However, the methodology was significant. It involved a variety of data sources, including autobiographical material, paid writings, family letters, newspaper files, public documents, and institutional letters.

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

Robert Park (1864–1944) Another figure of significance at Chicago was Robert Park (Shils, 1996). Park had come to Chicago as a part-time instructor in 1914 and quickly worked his way into a central role in the department. Park’s importance in the development of sociology lay in several areas. First, he became the dominant figure in the Chicago department, which, in turn, dominated sociology into the 1930s. Second, Park had studied in Europe and was instrumental in bringing continental European thinkers to the attention of Chicago sociologists. Park had taken courses with Simmel, and Simmel’s ideas, particularly his focus on action and interaction, were instrumental in the development of the Chicago school’s theoretical orientation (Rock, 1979:36–48). Third, prior to becoming a sociologist, Park had been a reporter, and that experience gave him a sense of the importance of urban problems and of the need to go out into the field to collect data through personal observation (Lindner, 1996; Strauss, 1996). Out of this emerged the Chicago school’s substantive interest in urban ecology (Gaziano, 1996; Maines, Bridger, and Ulmer, 1996; Perry, Abbott, and Hutter, 1997). Fourth, Park played a key role in guiding graduate students and helping develop “a cumulative program of graduate research” (Bulmer, 1984:13). Finally, in 1921, Park and Ernest W. Burgess published the first truly important sociology textbook, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*. It was to be an influential book for many years and was particularly notable for its commitments to science, research, and the study of a wide range of social phenomena.

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

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

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

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

A second basic concept that illustrates Cooley's social-psychological interests, and is also of continuing interest and importance, is that of the primary group. *Primary groups* are intimate, face-to-face groups that play a key role in linking the actor to the larger society. Especially crucial are the primary groups of the young—mainly the family and the peer group. Within these groups, the individual grows into a social being. It is basically within the primary group that the looking-glass self emerges and that the ego-centered child learns to take others into account and, thereby, to become a contributing member of society.

Both Cooley (Winterer, 1994) and Mead rejected a *behavioristic* view of human beings, the view that people blindly and unconsciously respond to external stimuli. They believed that people had consciousness, a self, and that it was the responsibility of the sociologist to study this aspect of social reality. Cooley urged sociologists to try to put

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



ROBERT PARK

A Biographical Sketch

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

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

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

Although the accurate description of social life remained one of his passions, Park grew dissatisfied with newspaper work because it did not fulfill his familial or, more important, his intellectual needs. Furthermore, it did not seem to contribute to the improvement of the world, and Park had a deep interest in social reform. In 1898, at age 34, Park left newspaper work and enrolled in the

themselves in the place of the actors they were studying, to use the method of *sympathetic introspection*, in order to analyze consciousness. By analyzing what they as actors might do in various circumstances, sociologists could understand the meanings and motives that are at the base of social behavior. The method of sympathetic introspection seemed to many to be very unscientific. In this area, among others, Mead's work represents an advance over Cooley's. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of similarity in the interests of the two men, not the least of which is their shared view that sociology should focus on such social-psychological phenomena as consciousness, action, and interaction.

George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) The most important thinker associated with the Chicago school and symbolic interactionism was not a sociologist but a philosopher,

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

His need to contribute to social betterment led him to become secretary and chief publicity officer for the Congo Reform Association, which was set up to help alleviate the brutality and exploitation then taking place in the Belgian Congo. During this period, he met Booker T. Washington, and he was attracted to the cause of improving the lot of black Americans. He became Washington's secretary and played a key role in the activities of the Tuskegee Institute. In 1912 he met W. I. Thomas, the Chicago sociologist, who was lecturing at Tuskegee. Thomas invited him to give a course on "the Negro in America" to a small group of graduate students at Chicago, and Park did so in 1914. The course was successful, and he gave it again the next year to an audience twice as large. At this time he joined the American Sociological Society, and only a decade later he became its president. Park gradually worked his way into a full-time appointment at Chicago, although he did not get a full professorship until 1923, when he was 59 years old. Over the approximately two decades that he was affiliated with the University of Chicago, he played a key role in shaping the intellectual orientation of the sociology department.

Park remained peripatetic even after his retirement from Chicago in the early 1930s. He taught courses and oversaw research at Fisk University until he was nearly 80 years old. He traveled extensively. He died on February 7, 1944, one week before his 80th birthday.

George Herbert Mead.⁴ Mead started teaching philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1894, and he taught there until his death in 1931 (Chriss, 2005b; G. Cook, 1993). He is something of a paradox, given his central importance in the history of sociological theory, both because he taught philosophy, not sociology, and because he published comparatively little during his lifetime. The paradox is, in part, resolved by two facts. First, Mead taught courses in social psychology in the philosophy department, and they were taken by many graduate students in sociology. His ideas had a profound effect on a number of them. These students combined Mead's ideas with those they were getting in the sociology department from people such as Park and

⁴ For a dissenting view, see J. Lewis and Smith (1980).

Thomas. Although at the time there was no theory known as symbolic interactionism, it was created by students out of these various inputs. Thus Mead had a deep, personal impact on the people who were later to develop symbolic interactionism. Second, these students put together their notes on Mead's courses and published a posthumous volume under his name. The work, *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead, 1934/1962), moved his ideas from the realm of oral to that of written tradition. Widely read to this day, this volume forms the main intellectual pillar of symbolic interactionism.

We deal with Mead's ideas in Chapter 10, but it is necessary at this point to underscore a few points in order to situate him historically. Mead's ideas need to be seen in the context of psychological behaviorism. Mead was quite favorably impressed with this orientation and accepted many of its tenets. He adopted its focus on the actor and his behavior. He regarded as sensible the behaviorists' concern with the rewards and costs involved in the behaviors of the actors. What troubled Mead was that behaviorism did not seem to go far enough. That is, it excluded consciousness from serious consideration, arguing that it was not amenable to scientific study. Mead vehemently disagreed and sought to extend the principles of behaviorism to an analysis of the mind. In so doing, Mead enunciated a focus similar to that of Cooley. But whereas Cooley's position seemed unscientific, Mead promised a more scientific conception of consciousness by extending the highly scientific principles and methods of psychological behaviorism.

Mead offered American sociology a social-psychological theory that stood in stark contrast to the primarily societal theories offered by most of the major European theorists (Shalin, 2000). The most important exception was Simmel. Thus symbolic interactionism was developed, in large part, out of Simmel's (Low, 2008) interest in action and interaction and Mead's interest in consciousness. However, such a focus led to a weakness in Mead's work, as well as in symbolic interactionism in general, at the societal and cultural levels.

The Waning of Chicago Sociology

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

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

Second, more and more individuals outside Chicago grew increasingly resentful of Chicago's dominance of both the American Sociological Society and the *American*

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

Women in Early Sociology

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

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

As the developing discipline of sociology marginalized these women as sociologists and sociological theorists, it often incorporated their research methods into its own practices, while using their activism as an excuse to define these women as “not sociologists.” Thus they are remembered as social activists and social workers rather than sociologists. Their heritage is a sociological theory that is a call to action as well as to thought.

W.E.B. Du Bois and Race Theory⁵

Although W.E.B. Du Bois (1868–1963) taught in a sociology department (Atlanta University) for a considerable amount of time, he usually is not thought of as a sociologist, let alone as a theorist. He is far better known as a public intellectual and for his founding and leadership roles in various civil rights organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). However, there is powerful sociology in many of his writings, and there are a number of abstract ideas that can be seen as theory, even though Du Bois (like Marx) was loath to distinguish between theory and practice. That is, he was uninterested in theory in itself, but rather developed abstract ideas in the service of advancing the cause of civil rights, primarily for African Americans.

Within sociology, Du Bois’s reputation has been based to a large degree on his empirical study *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899/1996). This study of the seventh ward in Philadelphia was conducted single-handedly by Du Bois, and although he employed a multitude of methods, it is best known as a pioneering ethnography. Over his long career, Du Bois wrote an unbelievable number of books, articles, and editorials, but few would be immediately obvious as “theory.” However, there is theory in his work, especially in his several unique autobiographical efforts (the best known of which is *The Souls of Black Folk* [Du Bois, 1903/1996]) that allowed him to develop interesting theoretical ideas in the context of reflections on his own life. Overarching all was his interest in the “race idea,” which he considered the “the central thought of all history” (Du Bois, 1897/1995:21), and the “color line,” which he saw as drawn across not only the United States but across much of the world. One of his best-known theoretical ideas is the *veil*, which creates a clear separation, or barrier, between African Americans and whites. The imagery is *not* of a wall but rather of a thin, porous material through which each race can see the other, but which nonetheless serves to separate the races. Another key theoretical idea is *double-consciousness*, a sense of “two-ness,” or a feeling among African Americans of seeing and measuring themselves through others’ eyes. There is not a full-fledged theory of society in Du Bois’s work, but there is a series of theoretical ideas about race and race relations in the United States and the world. With the rise of multicultural (and feminist) theories in recent years, Du Bois’s focus on race and his view of the world from the African American perspective have attracted a large number of new admirers and, more important, thinkers who are building on his pioneering ideas, perspectives, and commitments.

⁵ We will discuss a more specific and contemporary version of race theory—critical theories of race and racism—at the close of this chapter and in greater detail in Chapter 18.

Sociological Theory to Midcentury

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

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

Talcott Parsons (1902–1979)

Although Parsons published some early essays, his major contribution in the early years was his influence on graduate students, many of whom became notable sociological theorists themselves. The most famous was Robert Merton, who received his Ph.D. in 1936 and soon became a major theorist and the heart of Parsonsian-style theorizing at Columbia University. In the same year (1936), Kingsley Davis received his Ph.D., and he, along with Wilbert Moore (who received his Harvard degree in 1940), wrote one of the central works in structural-functional theory, the theory that was to become the major product of Parsons and the Parsonsians. But Parsons's influence was not restricted to the 1930s. Remarkably, he produced graduate students of great influence well into the 1960s.

The pivotal year for Parsons and for American sociological theory was 1937, the year in which he published *The Structure of Social Action*. This book was of significance to sociological theory in America for four main reasons. First, it served to introduce grand European theorizing to a large American audience. The bulk of the book was devoted to Durkheim, Weber, and Pareto. His interpretations of these theorists shaped their images in American sociology for many years.

Second, Parsons devoted almost no attention to Marx or to Simmel (D. Levine, 1991a), although he emphasized the work of Durkheim and Weber and even Pareto. As a result, Marxian theory continued to be largely excluded from legitimate sociology.

Third, *The Structure of Social Action* made the case for sociological theorizing as a legitimate and significant sociological activity. The theorizing that has taken place in the United States since then owes a deep debt to Parsons's work (Lidz, 2000).

Finally, Parsons argued for specific sociological theories that were to have a profound influence on sociology. At first, Parsons was thought of, and thought of himself, as an action theorist (Joas, 1996). He seemed to focus on actors and their thoughts and actions. But by the close of his 1937 work and increasingly in his later



W.E.B. DU BOIS

A Biographical Sketch

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was born on February 23, 1868, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts (D. Lewis, 1993). Compared to the vast majority of blacks of his day, Du Bois had a comparatively advantaged upbringing that led to college at Fisk

University and later to a Ph.D. from Harvard University with a stop along the way at the University of Berlin. At Harvard and in Germany, Du Bois came into contact with some of the great thinkers of his day, including philosophers William James and Josiah Royce, as well as the great social theorist Max Weber.

Du Bois took his first job teaching Greek and Latin at a black college (Wilberforce). He notes that "the institution would have no sociology, even though I offered to teach it on my own time" (Du Bois, 1968:189). Du Bois moved on in the fall of 1896 when he was offered a position as assistant instructor at the University of Pennsylvania to do research on blacks in Philadelphia. That research led to the publication of one of the classic works of early sociology, *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899/1996). When that project was completed, Du Bois moved (he never had a regular faculty position at Pennsylvania, and that, like many other things in his lifetime, rankled him) to Atlanta University, where he taught sociology from 1897 to 1910 and was responsible for a number of research reports on various aspects of Negro life in America. It was also in this period that he authored the first and most important of his autobiographical memoirs, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903/1996). This was a highly literary and deeply personal work that also made a series of general theoretical points and contributed greatly to the understanding of black Americans and of race relations. Du Bois published a number of such autobiographical works during the course of his life, including *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil* (1920/1999), *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940/1968), and *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois: A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century* (1968). Of *Dusk of Dawn*, Du Bois (1968:2) says, "I have written then what is meant to be not so much my autobiography as the autobiography of a concept of race, elucidated, magnified and doubtless distorted in the thoughts and deeds that were mine." (Du Bois was not lacking in self-esteem and has often been criticized for his oversized ego.)

While at Atlanta University, Du Bois became more publicly and politically engaged. In 1905 he called for and attended a meeting near Buffalo, New York, that led to the formation of the Niagara Movement, an interracial civil rights organization interested in such things as the "abolition of all caste distinctions based simply on race and color" (Du Bois, 1968:249). This formed the basis of the similarly interracial National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which came into existence in 1910, and Du Bois became its director of publications and research. He founded the NAACP's magazine, *The Crisis*, and in its pages authored many essays on a wide range of issues relating to the state of the

Negro in America. Du Bois took this new position because it offered him a platform for the widespread dissemination of his ideas (he was solely responsible for the editorial opinions of *The Crisis*). In addition, his position at Atlanta University had become untenable because of his conflict with the then very popular and powerful Booker T. Washington, who was regarded by most white leaders and politicians as the spokesman for black America. Du Bois came to view Washington as far too conservative and much too willing to subordinate Negroes to whites in general and specifically within the white-dominated economy, where they were to be trained for, and satisfied with, manual work.

For the next half century Du Bois was a tireless writer and activist on behalf of Negro and other racial causes (D. Lewis, 2000). He attended and participated in meetings throughout the United States and much of the world on Negroes in particular, and all "colored" races in general. He took positions on many of the pressing issues of the day, almost always from the vantage point of Negroes and other minorities. For example, he had views on which presidential candidates Negroes should support, whether the United States should enter World Wars I and II, and whether Negroes should support those wars and participate in them.

By the early 1930s the Great Depression had begun to wreak havoc on the circulation of *The Crisis*, and Du Bois lost control to young dissidents within the NAACP. He returned to Atlanta University and scholarly work and, among other things, authored *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (1935/1998). His tenure lasted a little more than a decade, and in 1944 Du Bois (then 76) was forcibly retired by the university. Under pressure, the NAACP invited him back as an ornamental figure, but Du Bois refused to play that role or to act his age and was dismissed in 1948. His ideas and work grew increasingly radical over the ensuing nearly two decades of his life. He joined and participated in various peace organizations and eventually was indicted by a grand jury in 1951 for failing to register as an agent of a foreign power in the peace movement.

Early in his life Du Bois had hope in America in general and, more specifically, believed that it could solve its racial problems peacefully within the context of a capitalist society. Over the years he lost faith in capitalists and capitalism and grew more supportive of socialism. Eventually, he grew more radical in his views and drifted toward communism. He was quite impressed with the advances communism brought to the Soviet Union and China. In the end, he joined the Communist Party. Toward the very end of his long life, Du Bois seemed to give up hope in the United States and moved to the African nation of Ghana. Du Bois became a citizen of Ghana and died there on August 27, 1963, the day before Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I have a dream" speech on the Mall in Washington, D.C. Du Bois was 95.

While wide-scale recognition of Du Bois as an important theorist may be relatively recent, he has long been influential within the black community. For example, on his becoming chairman of the board of the NAACP, Julian Bond said: "I think for people of my age and generation, this [a picture in his home of a young Bond holding Du Bois's hand] was a normal experience—not to have Du Bois in your home, but to have his name in your home, to know about him in your home. . . . This was table conversation for us" (cited in Lemert, 2000:346).

work, Parsons sounded more like a structural-functional theorist focusing on large-scale social and cultural systems. Although Parsons argued that there was no contradiction between these theories, he became best known as a structural functionalist, and he was the primary exponent of this theory, which gained dominance within sociology and maintained that position until the 1960s. Parsons's theoretical strength, and that of structural functionalism, lay in delineating the relationships among large-scale social structures and institutions (see Chapter 7).

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

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

Although Parsons played a number of important and positive roles in the history of sociological theory in the United States, his work also had negative consequences (Holton, 2001). First, he offered interpretations of European theorists that seemed to reflect his own theoretical orientation more than theirs. Many American sociologists were initially exposed to erroneous interpretations of the European masters. Second, as already pointed out, early in his career Parsons largely ignored Marx, which resulted in Marx's ideas being on the periphery of sociology for many years. Third, his own theory as it developed over the years had a number of serious weaknesses. However, Parsons's preeminence in American sociology served for many years to mute or overwhelm the critics. Not until much later did the weaknesses of Parsons's theory, and of structural functionalism in general, receive a full airing.

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

George Homans (1910–1989)

A wealthy Bostonian, George Homans received his bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1932 (Homans, 1962, 1984; see also Bell, 1992). As a result of the Great Depression, he was unemployed but certainly not penniless. In the fall of 1932, L. J. Henderson, a physiologist, was offering a course in the theories of Vilfredo Pareto, and Homans was invited to attend; he accepted. (Parsons also attended the Pareto seminars.)

Homans's description of why he was drawn to and taken with Pareto says much about why American sociological theory was so highly conservative, so anti-Marxist:

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

(Homans, 1962:4)

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

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

By the time Homans had returned from the war, the department of social relations had been founded by Parsons at Harvard, and Homans joined it. Although Homans respected some aspects of Parsons's work, he was highly critical of Parsons's style of theorizing. A long-running exchange began between the two men that later manifested itself publicly in the pages of many books and journals. Basically, Homans argued that Parsons's theory was not a theory at all but rather a vast system of intellectual categories into which most aspects of the social world fit. Further, Homans believed that theory should be built from the ground up on the basis of careful observations of the social world. Parsons's theory, however, started on the general theoretical level and worked its way down to the empirical level.

In his own work, Homans amassed a large number of empirical observations over the years, but it was only in the 1950s that he hit upon a satisfactory theoretical approach with which to analyze those data. That theory was psychological behaviorism, as it was best expressed in the ideas of his colleague at Harvard, the psychologist B. F. Skinner. On the basis of this perspective, Homans developed his exchange theory. We will pick up the story of this theoretical development later in this chapter. The crucial point here is that Harvard and its major theoretical product, structural functionalism, became preeminent in sociology in the late 1930s, replacing the Chicago school and symbolic interactionism.

The Chicago School in Decline

We left the Chicago department in the mid-1930s on the wane with the death of Mead, the departure of Park, the revolt of eastern sociologists, and the founding of the *American Sociological Review*. But the Chicago school did not disappear. Into the early 1950s it continued to be an important force in sociology.

The central figure in the Chicago department in this era was Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) (Blumer, 1969a; Maines, 2005). He was a major exponent of the theoretical approach developed at Chicago out of the work of Mead, Cooley, Simmel, Park, Thomas, and others. In fact, it was Blumer who coined the phrase *symbolic interactionism* in 1937. Blumer played a key role in keeping this tradition alive through his teaching at Chicago. He wrote a number of essays that were instrumental in keeping symbolic interactionism vital into the 1950s. Despite this flurry of activity, the Chicago school was in decline, especially given the movement of Blumer in 1952 from Chicago to the University of California at Berkeley. Whatever the state of the Chicago school, the Chicago tradition has remained alive to this day with major exponents dispersed throughout the country and the world (Sandstrom, Martin, and Fine, 2001).

Developments in Marxian Theory

From the early 1900s to the 1930s, Marxian theory continued to develop largely independently of mainstream sociological theory. At least partially the exception to this was the emergence of the critical, or Frankfurt, school out of the earlier Hegelian Marxism.

The idea of a school for the development of Marxian theory was the product of Felix J. Weil. The Institute of Social Research was officially founded in Frankfurt, Germany, on February 3, 1923 (Jay, 1973; Wiggershaus, 1994; Wheatland, 2009). Over the years, a number of the most famous thinkers in Marxian theory were associated with the critical school—Max Horkheimer (Schulz, 2007a), Theodor Adorno (Schulz, 2007b), Erich Fromm (N. McLaughlin, 2007), Herbert Marcuse (Dandaneau, 2007a), and, more recently, Jurgen Habermas.

The Institute functioned in Germany until 1934, but by then things were growing increasingly uncomfortable under the Nazi regime. The Nazis had little use for the Marxian ideas that dominated the Institute, and their hostility was heightened because many of those associated with it were Jewish. In 1934 Horkheimer, as head of the Institute, came to New York to discuss its status with the president of Columbia University. Much to Horkheimer's surprise, he was invited to affiliate the Institute with the university, and he was even offered a building on campus. And so a center of Marxian theory moved to *the* center of the capitalist world. The Institute stayed there until the end of the war, but after the war pressure mounted to return it to Germany. In 1949, Horkheimer did return to Germany, and he brought the Institute with him. Although the Institute itself moved to Germany, many of the figures associated with it took independent career directions.

It is important to underscore a few of the most important aspects of critical theory (Calhoun and Karaganis, 2001). In its early years, those associated with the Institute tended to be fairly traditional Marxists, devoting a good portion of their attention to the economic domain. But around 1930, a major change took place as this group of thinkers began to shift its attention from the economy to the cultural system especially the “culture industry” (Lash and Lury, 2007), which it came to see as the major force in modern capitalist society. This was consistent with, but an

extension of, the position taken earlier by Hegelian Marxists such as Georg Lukács. To help them understand the cultural domain, the critical theorists were attracted to the work of Max Weber. The effort to combine Marx and Weber and thereby create “Weberian Marxism”⁶ (Dahms, 1997; Lowy, 1996) gave the critical school some of its distinctive orientations and served in later years to make it more legitimate to sociologists who began to grow interested in Marxian theory.

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

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

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

Karl Mannheim and the Sociology of Knowledge

Brief mention should be made at this point of the work of Karl Mannheim (1893–1947) (Kettler and Meja, 1995; Ruef, 2007). Born in Hungary, Mannheim was forced to move first to Germany and later to England. Influenced by the work of Marx on ideology, as well as that of Weber, Simmel, and the neo-Marxist Georg Lukács, Mannheim is best known for his work on systems of knowledge (for example, conservatism). In fact, he is almost single-handedly responsible for the creation of the contemporary field known as the sociology of knowledge. Also of significance is his thinking on rationality, which tends to pick up themes developed in Weber’s work on this topic but deals with them in a far more concise and a much clearer manner (Ritzer, 1998).

From a base in England starting in the 1930s, Karl Mannheim was busy creating a set of theoretical ideas that provided the foundation for an area of sociology—the sociology of knowledge—that continues to be important to this day (E. McCarthy, 1996, 2007; Stehr, 2001). Mannheim, of course, built on the work of many predecessors, most notably Karl Marx (although Mannheim was far from being a Marxist). Basically, the sociology of knowledge involves the systematic study of knowledge, ideas, or intellectual phenomena in general. To Mannheim, knowledge is determined by social existence. For example, Mannheim seeks to relate the ideas of a group to that group’s position in the social structure. Marx did this by relating ideas to social classes, but Mannheim extends this perspective by linking ideas to a variety of different positions within society (for example, differences between generations).

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

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

Sociological Theory from Midcentury

Structural Functionalism: Peak and Decline

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

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

George Huaco (1986) linked the rise and decline of structural functionalism to the position of American society in the world order. As America rose to world dominance after 1945, structural functionalism achieved hegemony within sociology. Structural functionalism supported America's dominant position in the world in two ways. First, the structural-functional view that “every pattern has consequences which contribute to the preservation and survival of the larger system” was “nothing less than a celebration of the United States and its world hegemony” (Huaco, 1986:52). Second, the structural-functional emphasis on equilibrium (the best social change is no change) meshed well with the interests of the United States, then “the wealthiest and most powerful empire in the world.” The decline of U.S. world dominance in the 1970s coincided with structural functionalism's loss of its preeminent position in sociological theory.

Radical Sociology in America: C. Wright Mills

As we have seen, although Marxian theory was largely ignored or reviled by mainstream American sociologists, there were exceptions, the most notable of which is C. Wright Mills (1916–1962). Mills is noteworthy for his almost single-handed effort to keep a Marxian tradition alive in sociological theory. Modern Marxian sociologists have far

outripped Mills in theoretical sophistication, but they owe him a deep debt nonetheless for the personal and professional activities that helped set the stage for their own work (Alt, 1985–1986). Mills was not a Marxist, and he did not read Marx until the mid-1950s. Even then he was restricted to the few available English translations because he could not read German. Because Mills had published most of his major works by then, his work was not informed by a very sophisticated Marxian theory.

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

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

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

The Development of Conflict Theory

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

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

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

The biggest problem with most of conflict theory was that it lacked what it needed most—a sound basis in Marxian theory. After all, Marxian theory was well developed outside of sociology and should have provided a base on which to develop



C. WRIGHT MILLS

A Biographical Sketch

C. Wright Mills was born on August 28, 1916, in Waco, Texas (Dandaneau, 2007b; Domhoff, 2005; Hayden, 2006). He came from a conventional middle-class background: His father was an insurance broker, and his mother was a housewife. He attended the University of

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

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

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

a sophisticated sociological theory of conflict. The one exception here is the work of Ralf Dahrendorf (1929–2009).

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

In the end, conflict theory should be seen as little more than a transitional development in the history of sociological theory. It failed because it did not go far

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

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

(cited in Horowitz, 1983:83)

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

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

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

enough in the direction of Marxian theory. It was still too early in the 1950s and 1960s for American sociology to accept a full-fledged Marxian approach. But conflict theory was helpful in setting the stage for the beginning of that acceptance by the late 1960s.

The Birth of Exchange Theory

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

At first, Homans did not see how Skinner’s propositions, developed to help explain the behavior of pigeons, might be useful for understanding human social behavior. But as Homans looked further at data from sociological studies of small groups and anthropological studies of primitive societies, he began to see that

Skinner's behaviorism was applicable and that it provided a theoretical alternative to Parsonsian-style structural functionalism. This realization led in 1961 to Homans's book *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms*. This work represented the birth of exchange theory as an important perspective in sociology.

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

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

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

Although he was eclipsed for many years by Homans and Blau, Richard Emerson (1981) has emerged as a central figure in exchange theory (Cook and Whitmeyer, 2000). He is noted particularly for his effort to develop a more integrated micro-macro approach to exchange theory. Exchange theory has now developed into a significant strand of sociological theory, and it continues to attract new adherents and to take new directions (Cook, O'Brien, and Kollock, 1990; Szmataka and Mazur, 1996).

Dramaturgical Analysis: The Work of Erving Goffman

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

Goffman's best-known statement of dramaturgical theory, *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, was published in 1959. To put it simply, Goffman saw much in common between theatrical performances and the kinds of "acts" we all put on in our

day-to-day actions and interactions. Interaction is seen as very fragile, maintained by social performances. Poor performances or disruptions are seen as great threats to social interaction just as they are to theatrical performances.

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

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

The Development of Sociologies of Everyday Life

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

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

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

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

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

Ethnomethodology

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

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

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

The Rise and Fall (?) of Marxian Sociology

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

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

Along with an increase in interest came institutional support for such an orientation. Several journals devoted considerable attention to Marxian sociological theory, including *Theory and Society*, *Telos*, and *Marxist Studies*. A section on Marxist sociology was created in the American Sociological Association in 1977. Not only

did the first generation of critical theorists become well known in America, but second-generation thinkers, especially Jurgen Habermas, and even third-generation theorists such as Axel Honneth, received wide recognition.

Of considerable importance was the development of significant pieces of American sociology done from a Marxian point of view. One very significant strand is a group of sociologists doing historical sociology from a Marxian perspective (for example, Skocpol, 1979; Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989). Another is a group analyzing the economic realm from a sociological perspective (for example, Baran and Sweezy, 1966; Braverman, 1974; Burawoy, 1979). Still others are doing fairly traditional empirical sociology, but work that is informed by a strong sense of Marxian theory (Kohn, 1976, for example). A relatively recent and promising development is spatial Marxism. A number of important social thinkers (D. Harvey, 2000; Lefebvre, 1974/1991; Soja, 1989) have been examining social geography from a Marxian perspective.

However, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the fall of Marxist regimes around the world, Marxian theory fell on hard times in the 1990s. Some people remain unreconstructed Marxists; others have been forced to develop modified versions of Marxian theory (see the discussion below of the post-Marxists; there is also a journal entitled *Rethinking Marxism*). Still others have come to the conclusion that Marxian theory must be abandoned. Representative of the latter position is Ronald Aronson's book *After Marxism* (1995). The very first line of the book tells the story: "Marxism is over, and we are on our own" (Aronson, 1995:1). This from an avowed Marxist! While Aronson recognizes that some will continue to work with Marxian theory, he cautions that they must recognize that it is no longer part of the larger Marxian project of social transformation. That is, Marxian theory is no longer related, as Marx intended, to a program aimed at changing the basis of society; it is theory without practice. One-time Marxists are on their own in the sense that they can no longer rely on the Marxian project but rather must grapple with modern society with their "own powers and energies" (Aronson, 1995:4).

Aronson is among the more extreme critics of Marxism from within the Marxian camp. Others recognize the difficulties, but seek in various ways to adapt some variety of Marxian theory to contemporary realities (Brugger, 1995; Kellner, 1995). Nevertheless, larger social changes have posed a grave challenge for Marxian theorists, who are desperately seeking to adapt to these changes in a variety of ways. Whatever else can be said, the "glory days" of Marxian social theory appear to be over. Marxian social theorists of various types will survive, but they are not likely to approach the status and power of their predecessors in the recent history of sociology.

While neo-Marxian theory will never achieve the status it once had, it is undergoing a mini-renaissance (e.g., Hardt and Negri, 2000) in light of globalization, perceptions that the rich nations are growing richer and the poor are growing poorer (Stiglitz, 2002), and the resulting worldwide protests against these disparities and other abuses. There are many who believe that globalization has served to open the entire world, perhaps for the first time, to unbridled capitalism and the excesses that Marxists believe inevitably accompany it (Ritzer, 2004). If that is the case, and if the excesses continue and even accelerate, we will see a resurgence of interest in Marxian theory, this time applied to a truly global capitalist economy.

The Challenge of Feminist Theory

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

In Western societies, one can trace the record of critical feminist writings back almost 500 years, and there has been an organized political movement by and for women for more than 150 years. In America in 1920, the movement finally won the right for women to vote, fifty-five years after that right had been constitutionally extended to all men. Exhausted and to a degree satiated by victory, the American women's movement over the next thirty years weakened in both size and vigor, only to spring back to life, fully reawakened, in the 1960s. Three factors helped create this new wave of feminist activism: (1) the general climate of critical thinking that characterized the period; (2) the anger of women activists who flocked to the antiwar, civil rights, and student movements only to encounter the sexist attitudes of the liberal and radical men in those movements (Densimore, 1973; Evans, 1980; Morgan, 1970; Shreve, 1989); and (3) women's experience of prejudice and discrimination as they moved in ever-larger numbers into wage work and higher education (Bookman and Morgen, 1988; Garland, 1988). For these reasons, particularly the last one, the women's movement continued into the twenty-first century, even though the activism of many other 1960s movements faded. Moreover, during these years activism by and for women became an international phenomenon, drawing in women from many societies. Feminist writing has now entered its "third wave" in the writings of women who will spend most of their adult lives in the twenty-first century (C. Bailey, 1997; Orr, 1997). The most significant recent change in the women's movement has been the emergence among activist women of both a feminist and an antifeminist movement (Fraser 1989).

A major feature of this international women's movement has been an explosively growing new literature on women that makes visible all aspects of women's hitherto unconsidered lives and experiences. This literature, which is popularly referred to as *women's studies*, is the work of an international and interdisciplinary community of writers, located both within and outside universities and writing for both the general public and specialized academic audiences. Feminist scholars have launched a probing, multifaceted critique that makes visible the complexity of the system that subordinates women.

Feminist theory is the theoretical strand running through this literature: sometimes implicit in writings on such substantive issues as work or rape or popular culture; sometimes centrally and explicitly presented, as in the analyses of motherhood; and increasingly the sole, systematic project of a piece of writing. Of this recent spate of wholly theoretical writing, certain statements have been particularly salient to sociology because they are directed to sociologists by people well versed in sociological theory. Journals such as *Signs*, *Feminist Studies*, *Sociological Inquiry*, and *Gender & Society* bring feminist theory to the attention of sociologists; however, there is hardly a sociological journal that could not be called pro-feminist.

Feminist theory looks at the world from the vantage points of women, with an eye to discovering the significant but unacknowledged ways in which the activities of women—subordinated by gender and variously affected by other stratificational practices, such as class, race, age, enforced heterosexuality, and geosocial inequality—help create our world. This viewpoint dramatically reworks our understanding of social life. From this base, feminist theorists have begun to challenge sociological theory, especially its classical statements and early research.

Feminist writings now assume a critical mass in sociology. They offer an exciting paradigm for the study of social life. And those whose experiences and perceptions make them a receptive audience for this theory—women in general and both women and men affected by feminism in particular—may now constitute a numerical majority in the sociological community. For all these reasons, implications of feminist theory are moving increasingly into the mainstream of the discipline; engaging all its subspecialties; influencing many of its long-established theories, both macro and micro; and interacting with the new poststructuralist and postmodernist developments described below.

Structuralism and Poststructuralism

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

As structuralism grew within sociology, outside sociology a movement was developing beyond the early premises of structuralism: *poststructuralism* (Lemert, 1990; McCormick, 2007). The major representative of poststructuralism is Michel Foucault (Dean, 2001; J. Miller, 1993); another is Giorgio Agamben. In his early work, Foucault focused on structures, but he later moved beyond structures to focus on power and the linkage between knowledge and power. More generally, poststructuralists accept the importance of structure but go beyond it to encompass a wide range of other concerns.

Poststructuralism is important not only in itself but also because it often is seen as a precursor to postmodern social theory (to be discussed later in this chapter). In fact, it is difficult, if not impossible, to draw a clear line between poststructuralism and postmodern social theory. Thus Foucault, a poststructuralist, is often seen as a

postmodernist, while Jean Baudrillard (1972/1981), who usually is labeled a postmodernist, certainly did work that is poststructuralist in character.

Late-Twentieth-Century Developments in Sociological Theory

While many of the developments discussed in the preceding pages continued to be important in the late twentieth century, in this section we will deal with three broad movements—micro-macro integration, agency-structure integration, and theoretical syntheses—that were of utmost importance in that era and are to this day.

Micro-Macro Integration

A good deal of recent work in American sociological theory has been concerned with the linkage between micro and macro theories and levels of analysis (Barnes, 2001; Berk, 2006; J. Ryan, 2005a). In fact, I (1990a) argued that micro-macro linkage emerged as the central problematic in American sociological theory in the 1980s, and it continued to be of focal concern in the 1990s. The contribution of European sociologist Norbert Elias (1939/1994) is an important precursor to contemporary American work on the micro-macro linkage and aids our understanding of the relationship between micro-level manners and the macro-level state (Kilminster and Mennell, 2000; Van Krieken, 2001).

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

Agency-Structure Integration

Paralleling the growth in interest in the United States in micro-macro integration has been a concern in Europe for agency-structure integration (J. Ryan, 2005b; Sztompka, 1994). Just as I saw the micro-macro issue as the central problem in American theory, Margaret Archer (1988) saw the agency-structure topic as the basic concern in European social theory. While there are many similarities between the micro-macro and agency-structure literatures (Ritzer and Gindoff, 1992, 1994), there are also substantial differences. For example, although agents are usually micro-level actors, collectivities such

as labor unions can also be agents. And while structures are usually macro-level phenomena, we also find structures at the micro level. Thus, we must be careful in equating these two bodies of work and must take much care when trying to interrelate them.

There are several major efforts in contemporary European social theory that can be included under the heading of agency-structure integration. The first is Anthony Giddens's (1984; Stones, 2005b) structuration theory. Giddens's approach sees agency and structure as a "duality." That is, they cannot be separated from one another: agency is implicated in structure, and structure is involved in agency. Giddens refuses to see structure as simply constraining (as, for example, does Durkheim), but instead sees structure as both constraining and enabling. Margaret Archer (1982) rejects the idea that agency and structure can be viewed as a duality, but instead sees them as a dualism. That is, agency and structure can and should be separated. In distinguishing them, we become better able to analyze their relationship to one another. Archer (1988) is also notable for extending the agency-structure literature to a concern for the relationship between culture and agency and for developing a more general agency-structure theory (Archer, 1995).

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

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

The theorists discussed in this section are not only the leading theorists on the agency-structure issue, they are arguably (especially Bourdieu, Giddens, and Habermas) the leading theorists in the world today. After a long period of dominance by American theorists (Mead, Parsons, Merton, Homans, and others), the center of social theory seems to be returning to its birthplace—Europe. Furthermore, Nedelmann and Sztompka argued that with the end of the Cold War and the fall of communism, we were about to "witness another Golden Era of European Sociology" (1993:1). This seems to be supported by the fact that today the works that catch the attention of large numbers of the world's theorists are European.

Theoretical Syntheses

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

Then there are efforts to bring perspectives from outside sociology into sociological theory. There have been works oriented to bringing biological ideas into sociology in an effort to create sociobiology (Crippen, 1994; Maryanski and Turner, 1992). Rational choice theory is based in economics, but it has made inroads into a number of fields, including sociology (Coleman, 1990b; Heckathorn, 2005). Systems theory has its roots in the hard sciences, but in the late twentieth century Niklas Luhmann (1984/1995) made a powerful effort to develop a system theory that could be applied to the social world.

Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity

Over the last several decades, social theorists⁷ have become increasingly preoccupied with whether society (as well as theories about it) has undergone a dramatic transformation. On one side is a group of theorists (for example, Jurgen Habermas, Zygmunt Bauman, and Anthony Giddens) who believe that we continue to live in a society that still can best be described as modern and about which we can theorize in much the same way that social thinkers have long contemplated society. On the other side is a group of thinkers (for example, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, and Fredric Jameson) who contend that society has changed so dramatically that we now live in a qualitatively different, postmodern society. Furthermore, they argue that this new society needs to be thought about in new and different ways.

The Defenders of Modernity

All the great classical sociological theorists (Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel) were concerned, in one way or another, with the modern world and its advantages and disadvantages (Sica, 2005). Of course, the last of these (Weber) died in 1920,

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

and the world has changed dramatically since then. Although contemporary theorists recognize these dramatic changes, there are some who believe that there is more continuity than discontinuity between the world today and the world that existed around the last *fin de siècle*.

Mestrovic (1998:2) has labeled Anthony Giddens “the high priest of modernity.” Giddens (1990, 1991, 1992) uses terms such as “radical,” “high,” or “late” modernity to describe society today and to indicate that while it is not the same society as the one described by the classical theorists, it is continuous with that society. Giddens sees modernity today as a “juggernaut” that is, at least to some degree, out of control. Ulrich Beck (1992, 2005a; Jensen and Blok, 2008; Ekberg, 2007; Then, 2007) contends that whereas the classical stage of modernity was associated with industrial society, the emerging new modernity is best described as a “risk society.” Whereas the central dilemma in classical modernity was wealth and how it ought to be distributed, the central problem in new modernity is the prevention, minimization, and channeling of risk (from, for example, a nuclear accident). Jurgen Habermas (1981, 1987b) sees modernity as an “unfinished project.” That is, the central issue in the modern world continues, as it was in Weber’s day, to be rationality. The utopian goal is still the maximization of the rationality of both the “system” and the “life-world.” I (Ritzer, 2008b) also see rationality as the key process in the world today. However, I pick up on Weber’s focus on the problem of the increase in formal rationality and the danger of an “iron cage” of rationality. Weber focused on the bureaucracy. Today I see the paradigm of this process as the fast-food restaurant, and describe the increase in formal rationality as the McDonaldization of society. Zygmunt Bauman (2007b, 2006, 2005, 2003, 2000), has produced a series of basically modern analyses of what he calls the “liquid” world.

The Proponents of Postmodernity

Postmodernism was hot (Crook, 2001; Kellner, 1989a; Ritzer, 1997; Ritzer and Goodman, 2001). Indeed it was so hot and was discussed so endlessly in many fields in the late twentieth century, including sociology, that it seems already in the process of burning out (Lemert, 1994b). We need to differentiate, at least initially, between postmodernity and postmodern social theory (Best and Kellner, 1991). *Postmodernity* is a historical epoch that is supposed to have succeeded the modern era, or modernity. *Postmodern social theory* is a way of thinking about postmodernity; the world is so different that it requires entirely new ways of thinking. Postmodernists would tend to reject the theoretical perspectives outlined in the previous section, as well as the ways in which the thinkers involved created their theories.

There are probably as many portrayals of postmodernity as there are postmodern social theorists. To simplify things, I will summarize some of the key elements of a depiction offered by one of the most prominent postmodernists, Fredric Jameson (1984, 1991). First, postmodernity is a depthless, superficial world; it is a world of simulation (for example, a jungle cruise at Disneyland rather than the real thing). Second, it is a world that is lacking in affect and emotion. Third, there is a loss of a sense of one’s place in history; it is hard to distinguish past, present, and future. Fourth, instead of the explosive, expanding, productive technologies of modernity (for

example, automobile assembly lines), postmodern society is dominated by implosive, flattening, reproductive technologies (television, for example). In these and other ways, postmodern society is very different from modern society.

Such a different world requires a different way of thinking. Rosenau (1992; Ritzer, 1997) defines the postmodern mode of thought in terms of the things that it opposes, largely characteristics of the modern way of thinking. First, postmodernists reject the kind of grand narratives that characterize much of classical sociological theory. Instead, postmodernists prefer more limited explanations, or even no explanations at all. Second, there is a rejection of the tendency to put boundaries between disciplines—to engage in something called sociological (or social) theory that is distinct from, say, philosophical thinking or even novelistic storytelling. Third, postmodernists are often more interested in shocking or startling the reader than they are in engaging in careful, reasoned academic discourse. Finally, instead of looking for the core of society (say, rationality or capitalistic exploitation), postmodernists are more inclined to focus on more peripheral aspects of society.

Although postmodern theory seems to have reached its peak and now is in decline, it continues to exert a powerful impact on theory. On the one hand, new contributions to the theory continue to appear (for example, Powell and Owen, 2008). On the other hand, it is very difficult to theorize these days without taking into account postmodern theory, especially its critiques of modern theorizing and its analyses of the contemporary world.

Theories to Watch in the Early Twenty-first Century

Multicultural Social Theory, Queer Theory, and Critical Theories of Race and Racism

A recent development, closely tied to postmodernism—especially its emphasis on the periphery and its tendency to level the intellectual playing field—is the rise of multicultural social theory (Lemert, 2001; Rogers, 1996a). This rise of multicultural theory was foreshadowed by the emergence of feminist sociological theory in the 1970s. The feminists complained that sociological theory had been largely closed to women's voices, and in the ensuing years many minority groups echoed the feminists' complaints. In fact, minority women (for example, African Americans and Latinas) began to complain that feminist theory was restricted to white, middle-class females and had to be more receptive to many other voices. Today, feminist theory has become far more diverse, as has sociological theory.

Multicultural theory has taken a series of diverse forms. Examples include Afrocentric theory (Asante, 1996), Appalachian studies (Banks, Billings, and Tice, 1996), Native American theory (Buffalohead, 1996), and even theories of masculinity (Connell, 1996; Kimmel, 1996). Among the things that characterize multicultural theory are the following:

- Multicultural theories reject universalistic theories that tend to support those in power; multicultural theories seek to empower those who lack clout.

- Multicultural theory seeks to be inclusive, to offer theory on the behalf of many disempowered groups.
- Multicultural theorists are not value-free; they often theorize on behalf of those without power and work in the social world to change social structure, culture, and the prospects for individuals.
- Multicultural theorists seek to disrupt not only the social world but also the intellectual world; they seek to make it far more open and diverse.
- There is no effort to draw a clear line between theory and other types of narratives.
- There is ordinarily a critical edge to multicultural theory; it is both self-critical and critical of other theories and, most important, of the social world.
- Multicultural theorists recognize that their work is limited by the particular historical, social, and cultural context in which they happen to live (Rogers, 1996b:11–16).

Two of the most important of today's multicultural theories are *queer theory* and *critical theories of race and racism (CTRR)*.

Queer theory grew out of a series of key publications, academic conferences, political organizations, and published texts largely during the early 1990s. Its theoretical roots lie in a number of fields including feminist studies, literary criticism, and, most notably, social constructionism and poststructuralism. Queer theory also has political sources, notably in the larger project of queer politics and of groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation. Academically, queer theory has strong early roots in the works of Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Teresa de Lauretis.

Queer theory involves a range of intellectual ideas rooted in the contention that identities are not fixed and stable and do not determine who we are. Rather, identities are seen as historically and socially constructed processes that are both fluid and contested. Further, these identities need not be gay or lesbian. In fact, queer theory does not seek to explain homosexual or heterosexual identities by themselves, but rather approaches the homosexual/heterosexual divide as a figure of knowledge and power that orders desires, behaviors, social institutions, and social relations. Thus, although queer theory does take sexuality as one of its central concerns, it is a much broader intellectual project than gay and lesbian, or even sexuality, studies. Queer theory is therefore both more than and less than a theory of queers.

Sociologists and other social scientists have been making significant contributions to theories of racism at least since W.E.B. Du Bois's work early in the twentieth century. Such theorizing received an important impetus in recent years from the development of "critical race theory" largely in the field of law (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). That theory was a result of the growing recognition that the momentum of the civil rights movement of the 1960s had been lost and what was needed was not only a revival of social activism but also new ways of theorizing race. Among the ideas of critical race theory are the following:

- Racism is endemic to American life and therefore difficult to deal with.
- There is little incentive to whites to deal with racism.

- Race is a social construction and therefore subject to manipulation, and this leads to skepticism about the law, which can be similarly manipulated.
- Different minority groups have been racialized at different times.
- Racial identity is not unidimensional or fixed.
- The experiences and communities of origin of racial minorities are of great importance and serve to give racial minorities a unique expertise.
- Critical race theory is oriented to the elimination of racial oppression.

Critical theories of race and racism (CTRR) are rooted much more in the social sciences, including sociology, than is critical race theory. Thus, CTRR deal with such cutting-edge issues in theory as the relationship between race and racism and agency-structure, political economy, and globalization (including how race and racism relates to nation-states, nationalism, colonialism, neocolonialism, decolonization, imperialism, and empire). CTRR have a much broader, even global, focus than critical race theory. CTRR are also open to a much wider array of classical and contemporary theories as they apply to race, and they adopt a much broader macrostructural and macrocultural approach, especially one that focuses on power. A general conclusion to be derived from CTRR is that “race matters” and continues to matter not only in the legal system but throughout the structures and institutions of society (West, 1994). For example, Bonilla-Silva (2003) is critical of the view that racism today is of little more than historical interest. Rather, he sees color blindness as a smoke screen that allows white Americans to continue to perpetuate racial discrimination. Also in tune with CTRR is Bonilla-Silva’s proposal for a variety of practical steps to deal with this new form of racism. Another distinctive characteristic of CTRR is their effort to show that race also matters globally (Winant, 2001).

Overall, there is as yet no “theory,” critical of otherwise, of race and racism. However, there is a historical body of theory to draw on, and there are many available theoretical ideas and perspectives of great relevance, as well as a series of ideas developed already from within CTRR (e.g., intersectionality). This heritage, as well as ongoing work, will provide the base for the continuing development of CTRR.

Postmodern and Post-Postmodern Social Theories

Although postmodern social theories are no longer as hot as they once were, it is safe to assume that they will continue to influence sociology and many other fields. At the same time, there is already well established, primarily in France (the center of theoretical movements such as postmodernism), a body of work that is best thought of as post-postmodernism. For example, postmodern social theory is associated with a critique of a liberal, humanistic perspective and a shift away from a concern with the human subject. However, Ferry and Renaut (1985/1990) seek to rescue humanism and subjectivity, and Lilla (1994:20) offers a defense of human rights. Manent (1994/1998) self-consciously analyzes modernity and the human subject. Lipovetsky (1987/1994) attacks the tendency of postmodern social theorists to be hypercritical of the contemporary world by defending the importance of fashion. He argues, for example, that fashion enhances rather than detracts from individuality.

Theories of Consumption

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

Postmodern social theory has tended to define postmodern society as a consumer society, with the result that consumption plays a central role in that theory (Venkatesh, 2007). Most notable is Jean Baudrillard’s (1970/1998) *The Consumer Society*. Lipovetsky’s post-postmodern work on fashion is reflective of the growing interest in and out of postmodern social theory in consumption. Since consumption is likely to continue to grow in importance, especially in the West, and production is likely to decline, it is safe to assume that we will see a dramatic increase in theoretical (and empirical) work on consumption (Ritzer, Goodman, and Wiedenhof, 2001; for an overview of extant theories of consumption, see Slater, 1997, 2005). To take one example, we are witnessing something of an outpouring of theoretically based work on the settings in which we consume, such as *Consuming Places* (Urry, 1995), *Enchanting a Disenchanted World: Revolutionizing the Means of Consumption* (Ritzer, 2005a), and *Shelf Life: Supermarkets and the Changing Cultures of Consumption* (Humphery, 1998). We are likely to see much more work on such settings, as well as on consumers, consumer goods, and the process of consumption. A very new direction in this domain is Lork on *Prosumers*, those who simultaneously produce and consume, especially on the Internet and Web 2.0 (for example, blogs, Facebook) (Ritzer, 2009).

Theories of Globalization

Although there have been other important developments in theory in the early twenty-first century (see below), it seems clear that *the* most important developments are in theories of globalization (W. Robinson, 2007). Theorizing globalization is nothing new. In fact, it could be argued that although classical theorists such as Marx and Weber lacked the term, they devoted much attention to theorizing globalization. Similarly, many theories (e.g., modernization, dependency, and world-system theory) and theorists (e.g., Alex Inkeles, Andre Gunder Frank, and Immanuel Wallerstein) were theorizing about globalization in different terms and under other theoretical rubrics. Precursors to theorizing about globalization go back to the 1980s (and even before; see Moore, 1966; Nettl and Robertson, 1968) and began to gain momentum in the

1990s (Albrow and King, 1990; Albrow, 1996; Appadurai, 1996; Bauman, 1998; Garcia Canclini, 1995; Meyer, Boli, and Ramirez, 1997; Robertson, 1992). Such theorizing has really taken off in the twenty-first century (Beck, 2000, 2005b; Giddens, 2000; Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; Ritzer, 2004, 2007c; Rosenau, 2003). Theorizing globalization has become so important that an entire chapter (16) is devoted to it in this edition.

Theories of globalization can be categorized under three main headings—economic, political, and cultural theories. Economic theories, undoubtedly the best known, can be broadly divided into two categories: theories that celebrate the neoliberal global economic market (e.g., T. Friedman, 2000, 2005; see Antonio, 2007a, for a critique of Friedman’s celebration of the neoliberal market) and theories, often from a Marxian perspective (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 2004; W. Robinson, 2004; Sklair, 1992), that are critical of it.

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

A central issue in political theory is the continued viability of the nation-state. On the one side are those who see the nation-state as dead or dying in an era of globalization. On the other side of this issue are defenders of the continued importance of the nation-state. At least one of them (J. Rosenberg, 2005) has gone so far as to argue that globalization theory has already come and gone as a result of the continued existence, even reassertion, of the nation-state (e.g., France and the Netherlands vetoing the EU constitution in 2005).

Although economic and political issues are of great importance, it is cultural issues and cultural theories that have attracted the most attention in sociology. We can divide cultural theories into three broad approaches (Pieterse, 2004). The first is *cultural differentialism*, in which the argument is made that among cultures there are deep and largely impervious differences that are unaffected or are affected only superficially by globalization (Huntington, 1996). Second, the proponents of *cultural convergence* argue that although important differences remain among cultures, there is also convergence, increasing homogeneity, across cultures (Boli and Lechner, 2005; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Meyer et al., 1997; Ritzer, 2004, 2007c, 2008b). Third, there is *cultural hybridization*, in which it is contended that the global and the local interpenetrate to create unique indigenous realities that can be seen as “glocalization” (Robertson, 1992, 2001), “hybridization” (Canclini, 1995), and “creolization” (Hannerz, 1987). Much of the sociological thinking on globalization has been concerned with the issue, implied above, of the degree to which globalization is leading to homogenization or to heterogeneization.

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

Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network theory seems to be growing increasingly important and expanding its influence into a variety of specific domains in sociology (e.g., in the study of consumption; see Warde, 2005). On the one hand it is part of the broad and increasing interest in networks of various kinds (e.g., Castells, 1996; Mizruchi, 2005). But on the other hand it has a variety of unique orientations (Latour, 2007), not the least of which is its notion of the *actant*, which involves a number of obvious inclusions such as human agents but also includes a wide variety of nonhuman actors such as the Internet, ATMs, and telephone answering machines. This is in line with the move in the social world toward, and increasing scholarly interest in, the *posthuman* (Franklin, 2007) and the *postsocial* (Knorr-Cetina, 2001, 2005, 2007; Mayall, 2007). That is, we are increasingly involved in networks that encompass both human and nonhuman components, and in their relationships with the latter, humans are clearly in a posthuman and postsocial world.

Practice Theory

Another emerging theory, so new that it was not discussed in previous editions of this book, is practice theory. Actually, the work of some of the major contributors to this theory (such as Garfinkel, Bourdieu, Giddens, and Foucault) has been dealt with previously, but practice theory now shows signs of cohering into a distinctive theory that unites these and many other inputs. The focus is on practice, of human conduct, especially the impact of taken-for-granted assumptions on it. These assumptions are “pre-theoretical” in the sense that actors do not fully understand the nature of these assumptions and the degree of their impact on their practice (Biernacki, 2007). Practice is a routinized way of acting in which taken-for-granted assumptions affect how we act, especially how we manage our bodies, handle objects, treat subjects, describe things, and understand the world.

Take bodies, for example. In most other theories, the body is seen as being controlled by rational choices, larger structures, or normative systems. But to practice theory, practices are, at least in part, bodily performances that have been routinized. Practices come about as a result of training the body in a given way. Thus, for example, taking tennis lessons results in the ability of the body to hit a backhand or an overhead smash. This idea also extends to training the body so that talking, reading, and writing are made possible.

We are now at the close of the chapter reviewing developments in contemporary theory, but we certainly have not reached the end of theory development. Some of the theories discussed in this chapter will increase in importance (CTRR) while others (neofunctionalism) will experience a decline. One thing seems sure—the landscape of social theory is likely to be dotted with more theories, none of them likely to gain hegemony in the field. Postmodernists have criticized the idea of “totalizations,” or overarching theoretical frameworks. It seems unlikely that social theory will come to be dominated by a single totalization. Rather, we are likely to see a field with a proliferating number of perspectives that have some supporters and that help us

understand part of the social world. Sociological theory will not be a simple world to understand and to use, but it will be an exciting world that offers a plethora of old and new ideas.

Summary

This chapter picks up where Chapter 1 left off and deals with the history of sociological theory since the beginning of the twentieth century. We begin with the early history of American sociological theory, which was characterized by its liberalism, by its interest in Social Darwinism, and consequently by the influence of Herbert Spencer. In this context, the work of the two early sociological theorists, Sumner and Ward, is discussed. However, they did not leave a lasting imprint on American sociological theory. In contrast, the Chicago school, as embodied in the work of people such as Small, Park, Thomas, Cooley, and especially Mead, did leave a strong mark on sociological theory, especially on symbolic interactionism.

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

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

Structural functionalism's dominance within American theory in midcentury was rather short-lived. Although traceable to a much earlier date, phenomenological sociology, especially the work of Alfred Schutz, began to attract significant attention in the 1960s. Marxian theory was still largely excluded from American theory, but C. Wright Mills kept a radical tradition alive in America in the 1940s and 1950s. Mills also was one of the leaders of the attacks on structural functionalism, attacks that mounted in intensity in the 1950s and 1960s. In light of some of these attacks, a conflict-theory alternative to structural functionalism emerged in that period. Although influenced by Marxian theory, conflict theory suffered from an inadequate integration of Marxism. Still another alternative born in the 1950s was exchange theory, which continues to attract a small but steady number of followers. Although symbolic interactionism lost some of its steam, the work of Erving Goffman on dramaturgical analysis in this period gained a following.

Important developments took place in other sociologies of everyday life (symbolic interactionism can be included under this heading) in the 1960s and 1970s,

including some increase in interest in phenomenological sociology and, more important, an outburst of work in ethnomethodology. During this period Marxian theories of various types came into their own in sociology, although those theories were seriously compromised by the fall of the Soviet Union and other communist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Also of note during this period was the growing importance of structuralism and then poststructuralism, especially in the work of Michel Foucault. Of overwhelming significance was the explosion of interest in feminist theory, an outpouring of work that continues apace as we move through the twenty-first century.

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

The chapter concludes with a discussion of some theories to watch as we move through the first decade of the twenty-first century. Multicultural theories, especially those associated with race (CTRR) and queer theory, are likely to flourish. Postmodern theories will not go away, but more attention may well be devoted to post-postmodern theories—theories that use postmodern ideas and that go beyond them. We can also expect increasing interest in consumption and in theorizing about it. This relates to postmodern theory (consumer society is closely associated with postmodern society), reflects changes in society from an emphasis on production to consumption, as well as a reaction against the productivist bias that has dominated sociological theory since its inception. Perhaps the most dramatic growth is taking place, and is likely to continue to take place, in the theories of globalization. Other theories to watch are actor-network and practice theory.