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CHAPTER 1

Sociological Theory Today

JONATHAN H. TURNER

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If we placed ourselves back in 1950, what would we see in theoretical circles? Functional theorizing was about to become the dominant perspective; Marxist-oriented conflict theory in America was still in the closet imposed by McCarthyism, although alive and well in Europe in many guises but most prominently in the tradition of the Frankfurt School (Turner, 1998, pp. 545–557; Held, 1980; Schroyer, 1973); and symbolic interactionism was carrying forth the legacy of George Herbert Mead. At the general level, this is all there was, although many more specific theories of meso processes could be observed, theories such as urban ecology, differential association, and anomie theory in criminology, phenomenology, theories from the Gestalt tradition (e.g., cognitive dissonance, congruity, and balance theories) in social psychology, and perhaps a half dozen other narrow theories.[1] A little over a decade later, functionalism was being challenged by European conflict theorists who prodded a new generation of Marxist theorists in America to take up the challenge, structuralism was emerging in Europe and about to infect America, and exchange theory was just making its entrance. Still, there were few general approaches, but things were about to change. The 1960s and 1970s saw a proliferation of theoretical perspectives that continues to this day.

Today, sociology is experiencing what can only be described as hyperdifferentiation of theories; and if Randall Collins' (1998) "law of small numbers" has any merit, there are now too many approaches competing for an attention space that in the intellectual arena can manage at best seven approaches. From this perspective, we should see a weeding out of theories to a smaller number, but in fact, this is not likely to occur because each of the many theoretical perspectives has a resource base of adherents, a place in academia, and a series of outlets for scholarly publications (Turner & Turner, 1990). As a result, theories in sociology do not compete head on with each other as much as they coexist. One of the effects of hyper-differentiation is that many new resource niches are created, allowing scholars and their students to operate without having to justify their importance vis-à-vis other theories, and this

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[1]Textbooks in theory tended to list many more theoretical perspectives, but the distinctions made by authors in the 1950s, for the most part, were labels that they imposed. Actual theorizing was confined to a few general approaches, plus a larger number of more specific theories on specific substantive topics.

JONATHAN H. TURNER • Department of Sociology, University of California, Riverside, California 92521.

is especially so as sociological theory has abandoned the requirement that it be tested against empirical facts.

True, the most prominent theoretical orientations do indeed compete, and here we see the law of small numbers operating since there are probably no more than seven major approaches dominating the spotlight.[2] But backstage, there is lots of activity among less prominent theoretical programs that often pay scant attention to the actors on the center stage. The result is for many diverse theoretical approaches to persist. No one theoretical perspective in sociology has any chance of becoming hegemonic, even to the extent of functionalism in the 1950s or conflict theory in the 1960s. Indeed, the diversity of approaches has led to a smug cynicism about the prospects of theory being anything more than texts produced people who call themselves sociologists and who, for many, should not have a privileged voice. Thus, sociological theory will never be fully scientific (see Chapter 2, this volume, on what makes sciences "scientific").

The chapters in this volume represent a mix of theoretical orientations and strategies, but as is evident, these theories are very diverse, and the selection in this volume does not include some important approaches; to name a few, structuration, network, and ecological theories. But the pages to follow do give a sense for the range of activities pursued by sociological theorists. In this chapter, I do not intend to summarize specific chapters; rather, I want to offer my own impressions of what has occurred to theoretical sociology over the last five decades, freely venting my own views and prejudices as I try to review at least the major axes along which theories have differentiated.

DIVERSE STANCES ON EPISTEMOLOGY

Is Sociological Theory to Be Scientific?

From sociology's inception, the prospects for theories resembling those in the natural sciences have been debated. August Comte (1830–1842), of course, argued for a theoretically driven positivism in which the laws of human organization were to be very much like those in the physics of his time. Comte found ready allies in Herbert Spencer and Émile Durkheim and perhaps Georg Simmel, but Karl Marx and Max Weber had doubts about the scientific prospects of sociology—doubts that persist to this day. Marx saw theory as part of a critique of existing social conditions and as a way to mobilize opposition to these conditions. Weber did not hold this view, but he believed that much of social reality involves the chance confluence of events, thereby making general laws of human organization difficult; instead of theoretical laws, objective descriptions of phenomena with analytical ideal types could be undertaken, but these analytical descriptions would not constitute a subject matter amenable to universal laws (see Chapter 23, this volume, on Weberian theory today). Thus, by the turn into the 20th century, three positions could be discerned: (1) those who saw sociology as a natural science that would discover the laws of human organization; (2) those who emphasized theory as critique and as a call for action; and (3) those who saw sociological "explanation" as revolving around interpreting empirical events in terms of analytical schemes consisting of categories describing classes of empirical phenomena.

These positions still exist today, but like all else in sociology, they have many variants. A minority of theorists are positivists in this sense: they see their goal as developing general

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[2]At center stage, there are from four to seven major perspectives, conforming to Collins' law of small numbers. But, in the wings are many more theoretical orientations that persist because they have a resource base.

scientific principles and models of generic social processes (see Chapters 3 and 4). Many are critical theorists of many stripes: Marxists who continue to use theory as both an analysis and critique of the existing system of oppression (see Chapter 22, for an example); descendants of the Frankfurt School who carry the emancipatory spirit of Marx and the pessimism of Weber, and who as a result see the role of the theorist as constructing analytical schemes exposing patterns of domination (e.g., Habermas 1962, 1970, 1984; see Chapter 5, this volume); world systems theorists who take Marxian analysis global and conduct both analysis and critique of capitalism on the world stage (e.g., Wallerstein, 1974; Chapter 27, this volume); and post-modernists who carry on a double critique of science as a failed epistemology and of capital-ism as a system whose technologies and markets destroy local cultures, compress time and space, commodify virtually everything, and fracture the individual (e.g., Lyotard, 1984; Chapters 6 and 8, this volume). Probably the largest group of theorists, many of whom have doubts about science, construct analytical schemes of categories for "interpreting" current events; and although their respective styles of scheme-building vary, they all see theory as an interpretative enterprise using a conceptual system of categories denoting important phenom-ena (e.g., Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1984).

Over the whole of the last decade of the 20th century, increasing cynicism about the prospects of scientific theory was evident. Looking back 50 years ago, especially in America, there was real optimism that sociology would sit at the table of science, but today a much smaller proportion of sociological theorists hold such a position. Many of those who see themselves as social theorists do not consider the goal of sociological theory to be the articulation of general laws of human organization. These theorists may differ radically on what they propose as an alternative, but they are all critical of the epistemology of science.

My views on the epistemiological wars in theory circles are well known. I will simply repeat what I have said before: If sociological theory is not scientific, then what is it? My an-swer is that it becomes various mixes of journalism, ideological preaching, critique of perceived wrongs, and vague philosophizing. Such alternatives to the epistemology science do not, I believe, take sociology in a very healthy direction. They assure that we will be a watered-down humanities and that we will be irrelevant to policymakers and even our fellow academics.

Is Sociological Theory to Be Micro or Macro?

Outside of the epistemological arena, the most debated issue in sociological theory is the linkages among micro-level and macro-level phenomena. How are theories of action, behav-ior, and interpersonal processes, on the one side, to be reconciled with theories of population-level and societal-level forces, on the other? All sciences reveal a micro–macro divide, and even the most advanced sciences have not reconciled the two levels theoretically. In sociology, however, the issue appears to have persisted and pestered theorists for several decades (e.g., Alexander et al., 1987; Huber, 1991; Emirbayer & Mische, 1999; Ritzer & Gindoff, 1994), and we can ask why this should be so, especially in a discipline where much theory does not aspire to be scientific.

One reason for the persistence of the issue is that it is conflated with other questions that pull theorists back into epistemological issues. In Europe but also in America, micro–macro issues are often conflated with agency–structure questions (e.g., Archer, 1982, 1988; Giddens, 1984; Smart, 2001). If one gives primacy to action, then structure and culture are at best constraints on such action; but more fundamentally, action is not determinative and predict-able, which in turn makes the scientific pretensions of sociology just that—pretensions. If, on the other hand, action is constrained by culture and structure, it is more predictable, and

hence amenable to study in scientific terms. I have simplified the antagonists here, but the important point is that agency–structure questions take us right back to epistemological doubts about sociology as a scientific enterprise. And most approaches that try to reconcile the two (e.g., Giddens, 1976) are decidedly antiscience, seeing agency as only loosely constrained by structure and as indeterminate in the production and reproduction of structure. All of these approaches are incredibly vague and metaphorical about the relations between agency and structure, and this vagueness merely labels the issue but with an antiscience bias.

Another reason the micro–macro, or agency–structure, debate continues is because of what I call "micro-chauvinism," whereby a good many theorists argue for the primacy of the micro (e.g., Berger & Luckman, 1967; Coleman, 1990; Collins, 1981a,b). Micro-chauvinists vary in whether or not they are willing to acknowledge the reality of the macro as more than a reification of the analyst, but they all argue that reality is to be explained by reference to the micro-social processes. Modern-day symbolic interactionists were the first to make this extreme assertion (e.g., Blumer, 1969); others such as ethnomethodologists, at least in the early years (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967), also made this assertion, as did the extreme behaviorists (e.g., Homans, 1961). But over the last three decades, a growing number of theorists in other traditions has made the argument that the macro, if it exists, is to be explained by the micro. Rational choice theory is one prominent example of this emphasis (e.g., Hechter, 1987; Coleman, 1990; Chapter 29, this volume); interaction ritual theory is another (e.g., Collins, 1975; Chapter 24, this volume). When reality is reducible to theories of micro-processes, a good part of social reality is in essence not considered the proper subject matter of theory. Naturally, to defend their turf, those working at the meso- and macro-levels spin out counter-arguments, thus proliferating theories in sociology, which if they do not criticize each other, will ignore the pronouncements of micro-chauvinists.

There are also more macro-chauvinists (e.g., Blau, 1994, 1977a,b; Mayhew, 1981a,b; see also Chapter 17, this volume), but this chauvinism is generally more tempered, simply arguing that there are emergent realities that need to be explained in their own terms (Turner, 2000, 2002). While these emergent realities do indeed constrain action and interaction at the micro-level, they do not determine in any precise manner micro processes.

There has been a number of strategies to reconcile the micro-macro divide that are less chauvinistic (Turner, 1983, 2002; see also Chapter 18, this volume). Perhaps the most popular is implied by Max Weber's (1921/1968) analysis of building conceptual staircases from "action" to "social relationships" to "associations" to "legitimated orders." Talcott Parsons (1951) followed a similar strategy in his analysis of "modes of orientation and motivation" leading to actions that form relationships in "social systems" composed of "status-roles" and typified by the "pattern variables." The general argument of these approaches is that as one adds more actors and relationships, additional concepts are introduced to account for the emergent properties of each new level of reality, but the problem with most such approaches is that they become much like Weber's sociology, a series of analytical categories that describe but do not explain the dynamics of each level of reality.

Another approach comes from Simmel (1895) and his advocacy for a formal sociology. Here, emphasis is on the forms of the relationships rather than the properties of the actors in the relationship, with the theories thereby explaining the dynamics of relationships among both individuals and collective actors. Network theory and more significantly exchange network theory (e.g., Emerson, 1962; Molm & Cook, 1995) take this approach; while considerable insight has come from these theories (see Chapter 31, this volume), it is probably true that the nature of the actor sometimes does make a difference in the dynamics of their relationships. Isomorphism does exist no doubt across levels of reality, but this fact cannot explain away the emergent and unique properties of each level.

Yet another strategy for dealing with the micro–macro gap is what might be termed

deductive reductionism in which axioms or higher-order propositions about behavior or other micro-processes stand at the top of a deductive system of propositions, with the laws of social structure and culture derived from, and hence explained by, these axioms (e.g., Homans, 1961; Emerson, 1972; Blau, 1994; see also Chapter 3, this volume). Such an approach acknowledges the reality of the meso and macro and the laws of sociology that explain their operation, but it emphasizes that these laws are deducible from the laws of micro-processes. In this way, the gap in explanations at different levels of reality is closed by the deductive structure of the theory.

The recent rise in cultural theory in some respects is an effort to deal with the micro–macro problem, although it obviously is much more (Lamont & Wuthnow, 1990; see also Chapters 7, 9, and 10, this volume). When attention shifts from social structures to systems of symbols, it is much easier to see how culture becomes part of the individual, and conversely, how thoughts and acts of individuals generate, change, or reproduce culture. For ultimately culture is either inside of people's heads or deposited in warehouses, such as libraries, and it is used by people in action and interaction. Thus a more macro force—culture—is more readily connected to a micro force—thoughts, actions, and interactions of people who have inter- nalized culture—than is the case when structure as networks of relationships must be recon- ciled with individuals' actions. This is why, I suspect, that structuralism became so popular; it allowed sociologists to see structure as cultural symbols, and as such, it is far easier to connect macro- and micro-levels of analysis. Anthony Giddens' (1984) structuration theory is a good example, because structure as "rules and resources" that are used by actors in micro-settings allows for an easier reconciliation of micro and macro. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of "habitus" is a name for the nexus between culture and the individual, again connect- ing micro and macro. Of course, culture is not all that there is to the macro-realm; and these approaches do not solve the problem of how to conceive of structure as anything more than rules and other cultural processes. The cultural turn in sociology, then, only gives the illusion of resolving the micro–macro problem.

Some who have advocated this cultural turn (e.g., Alexander, 1982–1984) argue for a multidimensional approach to theorizing about micro- and macro-processes. Action and order are each considered important dimensions of the social world and each is conceptualized, but in fact, such conceptualizations simply label the problem rather than resolve it. Action has certain properties, and order or structure–culture has its own distinctive properties; but the question remains: How is a *theoretical* integration to occur beyond simply stating that action is constrained by order and that order is reproduced and changed by action? Other multidimen- sional approaches, such as Ritzer's (1985, 1988a,b, 1990) "integrated paradigm," categorize reality along two intersecting dimensions: microscopic–macroscopic and objective–subjective. And then, various approaches are placed in the four quadrants created by these two continua— that is, micro-subjective, macro-subjective, micro-objective, macro-objective—but all this does is once again categorize approaches. It does not reconcile them theoretically or produce integrated explanations.

One of the most famous approaches for reconciling micro–macro theorizing was Robert Merton's (1968) advocacy for "theories of the middle range." In this approach, sociology would abandon the grand analytical schemes like Talcott Parsons' "action theory" in favor of theories about specific substantive topics, awaiting a later Einstein to come along and integrate these middle-range theories with the equivalent of general relativity theory. The end result of this advocacy was to produce "theories of" each substantive area in sociology, which of course only proliferated the number of specialized theories in the discipline. Since these theories were so specialized, and indeed, since they often elevated empirical generalizations to the status of laws, there was little hope that they would be integrated in ways that would resolve any theoretical problem, much less the micro–macro linkage question.

The most obvious solution to the micro–macro problem has not, in my view, been pursued with any commitment (Turner, 2002). This solution involves recognizing that social reality does indeed unfold along micro, meso, and macro dimensions; that each of these levels reveals its own emergent properties; that these properties are driven by forces distinctive to each level; that theory is to be about the dynamics of the forces operating at each level; and that theoretical integration will always be about how the properties of one level load the values for the unique forces operating at other levels. This kind of synthesis does not produce a "unified theory" but rather a series of theoretical models and principles on forces of one level of reality, as these are influenced by structures at other levels of reality (as David Boyns and I explore in Chapter 18; see also Turner, 2000, 2002).

Thus, sociological theory has not resolved its micro-macro divide any more than other sciences, although sociological theorists seem rather more obsessed with the problem. Added to this are the disagreements over epistemology, and we can see why sociological theory has moved in so many diverse directions. There is no accepted epistemology among theorists, and efforts to resolve the micro–macro gap have tended to produce "solutions" that further differentiate theory. The end result is a hyperdifferentiated discipline, at both the theoretical and substantive levels.

DIVERSE THEORY TRADITIONS IN SOCIOLOGY

Functional Theory

Functionalism was sociology's first theoretical orientation, and for a brief time in the 1950s and early 1960s, it dominated sociological theorizing (see Turner & Maryanski, 1979, for a history). Today, functionalism is virtually dead, except for a few dedicated theorists who continue to work in the tradition (e.g., Münch, 1982). Functional theory always asks the question of how a particular phenomenon operates to meet the survival needs or requisites of a larger social system, as the latter seeks to adapt to its environment. The notion of "needs" or "requisites" always poses a problem in such theorizing because it often appears that the need for something brings this something about; or alternatively, the reasoning becomes circular: system parts exist to allow the system to meet its needs for survival in an environment; and we know that a part of this system is meeting these needs because the system is surviving.

Early functionalism, however, avoided these problems by examining differentiation as a kind of master social process. Herbert Spencer (1874–1896) emphasized the axes along which social systems differentiate, whereas Émile Durkheim (1893) examined the new bases for integration of social systems undergoing differentiation. From their respective analyses, it is rather easy to extract testable propositions. Thus, it is not functionalism per se that creates problems, but rather it was the particular mode of analysis conducted by Talcott Parsons. Parsons' functionalism emphasized requisites (the famous, A,G,I,L) and built an elaborate category system around these requisites (Parsons, Bales, & Shils, 1953; Parsons & Smelser, 1956). Such an approach saw explanation as placing an empirical case into an analytical category. This approach had no real theoretical legs because to categorize a phenomenon in a rather elaborate conceptual scheme does not explain it. This problem of believing that classification is explanation was far more fatal to functionalism than its supposed ideological conservatism (e.g., Dahrendorf, 1958; Lockwood, 1956).

Neofunctionalism (e.g., Alexander, 1985; Alexander & Colomy, 1985) abandoned the notion of requisites—the defining feature of all functional analysis—and emphasized the

master process of differentiation and relatedly cultural processes. As a result, neofunctional-
ism is not functional theory (Turner & Maryanski, 1988). Even with the abandonment of the
notion of needs or requisites, neofunctional sociology never really was accepted as theory,
although it can be credited with bringing back into focus the central problematic of early
functional sociology: the process of differentiation with a special emphasis on cultural bases of
integration in differentiated social systems (see Chapter 7). Neofunctionalism, then, helped
bring culture back to prominence within sociological theory but did not make functionalism
any more acceptable.

The demise of functionalism left the door open for many new approaches to gain
prominence or to regain prominence lost under the brief hegemony of Parsonian functional-
ism. The most obvious benefactor was the approach most responsible for the demise of
functionalism: conflict theory.

Conflict Theory

With the exception of a few persistent souls (e.g., Mills, 1956), conflict theory remained
closeted during the McCarthy era in America (1950s); but as Europeans began to criticize
functionalism (e.g., Dahrendorf, 1958; Lockwood, 1956) and as the repression of the Cold War
era lessened, conflict theory emerged in America and during the cultural changes of the 1960s
and 1970s became the most dominant theoretical orientation. Even those who were not conflict
theorists began to label themselves in this manner, if only to get attention or appear in vogue.
Indeed, for a time all theories were "required" by the new (in)sensibilities to talk about power
and conflict—as if this is all that there is in the social universe.

As a critique of functionalism, conflict theorists were rather unfair; and out of the ex-
tremes of this critique, sociologists discovered the obvious: social systems reveal both integra-
tive and conflict processes. Only in an environment where the conflict theorists had gone
overboard would such an obvious statement be taken seriously, as somehow profound. What
conflict theory did do, however, is shift the focus of theoretical sociology to the conditions
under which varying types of conflict emerge in social systems; once this shift in emphasis had
occurred, many diverse conflict approaches developed.

One was the Marxian and Weberian emphasis on how inequality and stratification
generate conflicts between social classes (e.g., Dahrendorf, 1959). Another was an effort to
update Marx to deal with the fact that a revolution never occurred in capitalism, and moreover
that classes do not polarize in capitalist system but on the contrary they proliferate (Wright,
1985, 1997; see also Chapter 22). Social movements theorizing got an enormous boost, moving
from a subfield within collective behavior to the study of mobilizations (see Chapter 25, as
well as Chapter 26). Exchange theories often saw themselves in conflict terms (e.g., Collins,
1975; Blau, 1964), although few proposed the obvious point that much conflict theory is a
subcase of exchange theory (or what transpires when the exchange of resources is unequal in a
social system). World systems theory (Wallerstein, 1974; Frank, 1979) also emerged in the
heady days of the conflict revival, and this approach has evolved from its purely Marxian roots
into a variety of approaches examining globalization issues (e.g., Chase-Dunn, 1989; Chase-
Dunn & Hall, 1997; Sanderson, 1988, 1995); and indeed, theorizing about globalization is the
new hot area in sociology (see Chapter 27). Perhaps the most interesting offshoot of conflict
theory was the rise of comparative–historical sociology, which disproportionately perhaps,
has focused on revolutions but which nonetheless became the entry point for a new historical
sociology that represents one of the brighter branches of sociology today (see Chapter 26).

Today, sociologists do not go around thumping their chests, proclaiming themselves to be

conflict theorists as they once did in the 1960s. This is due, perhaps, to the widespread acceptance of all varieties of conflict theory in sociology; somehow we are more secure in studying conflict, which itself is a rather remarkable admission. Today, conflict theory is often specialized, focusing on specific forms of inequality and conflict, such as ethnic antagonism or gender tensions (see Chapter 28, for an illustration in the area of gender).

Many early conflict theories implied a critique (of functionalism, of capitalism, of imperialism, of colonialism, and of lots of things). European sociology had a much longer legacy on this score than American social theory, and this critical focus has evolved into a distinctive perspective in both Europe and America (see Chapter 6).

Critical Theorizing

Sociological theory always has had a critical edge. The discipline emerged in response to the transformations associated with modernity; and theorists often posited pathological conditions, such as alienation, exploitation, anomie, marginality, iron cages, and other ills associated with the rise of capitalism. In America, despite the high-sounding rhetoric about being scientific, sociology began with a "social problems" emphasis, seeing the goals of sociology as revolving around amelioration (Turner & Turner, 1990). Some such as Auguste Comte (1830–1842) and perhaps Émile Durkheim saw scientific theory as the vehicle for social reconstruction, but most critical theory has been antiscience, often portraying science as part of the problem.

In the 20th century, critical theory first became codified within the Frankfurt School, which had the emancipatory zeal of Marx but the realistic and pessimistic assessment of Weber as to the power of rational–legal authority to dominate individuals. Like most critical theorists, the Frankfurt School wanted to expose patterns of domination and control even if they had no real program to deal with these oppressive patterns. The goal of much critical theory thus became one of criticizing, usually within the secure confines of academia, leaving the question of how to manage the problems exposed by such criticism to others, or perhaps to another time in the future when conditions were more favorable to emancipation.

Contemporary critical theory has not really moved from this stance in the 21st century. Scholars like Jurgen Habermas (1962, 1970, 1979, 1984), the direct descendant of the Frankfurt School, continue to agonize over the loss of "the public sphere" (assuming that it actually had existed) and the invasion of the "life world" by a rationalized–bureaucratized economy and by a politico-administrative apparatus. Such critiques tend to be more philosophical than sociological, but they have inspired many to make similar claims about the power of the forces unleashed by capitalism to invade local cultures and personal self.

Postmodernism is perhaps the most prominent form of critical theory today, but it really builds on themes that were evident with the early founders of sociology (Allan & Turner, 2001; see also Chapter 8). For postmodernists, the development of communication and transportation technologies, the expansions of capitalism to a global scale, and the capacity of high-volume and far-reaching markets to commodify just about anything, including symbols and lifestyles, are destroying local cultures, symbols of groups, and the integrity of the individual. Because all can be commodified and marketed on a global scale, cultural symbols are lifted from their local context and marketed, thus reducing the power of symbols to regulate the activities of local groups. Similarly, because people can now buy in markets the trappings of a new self, persons have become incapable of having a unified sense of who they are, particularly as the power of local cultures has declined with commodification of symbols. Among

these postmodern theorists, the retread Marxists (e.g., Jameson, 1984; Lash & Urry, 1994; Harvey, 1989) appear to have the analysis of the transformations ushered in by globalization correct, but the more culturally oriented wing of postmodernism (e.g., Braudrillard, 1994; Lyotard, 1984) appears to go off the deep end in asserting without any hard data how these trends are changing the social world and person in fundamental ways.

The great problem with critical theory is not so much the critical dimension to this work but the theory part. Theory in the hands of most critical theorists becomes a license to say just about anything one wants about the social world, apparently without the requirement to check these pronouncements against data. Evil forces are posited and bad consequences are seen to ensue from these forces. While there is almost always an element of insight in these diagnoses, they almost always are too extreme to have much credibility. For we can ask: Have local cultures been destroyed? Have people lost a sense of their own self? Are people less embedded in groups than 100 years ago? Has commodification trivialized the symbols of groups? And so on. Scant amounts of systematic data have been brought to bear on these and related empirical questions; and until such data are forthcoming, we can take with a grain of salt many of the pronouncements of critical theory (see Chapters 6 and 8, for another assessment of post-modern theory). Critical theory has, like conflict theory in general, become more specialized, roughly paralleling social movements such as the civil rights and feminist movements. Feminist theory is clearly the most prominent of these more specialized critical theories (Chafetz, 1988, 1990; see also Chapter 28, for an assessment).

Evolutionary Theory

Sociological theory always has had an evolutionary bent. Every one of the founders of sociology saw societies as changing toward increased complexity, and each emphasized par-ticular aspects of this transformation. Some were explicitly evolutionary, others less so, but all saw society as moving in a particular direction. While stage models of evolution came under relentless attack in the early decades of the 20th century, these models reappeared in the last decades of the century, in a variety of forms. One direction was a revival of the stage model, with theorists viewing societies as moving through identifiable stages (e.g., Parsons, 1966; Lenski, 1966). Another was world systems analysis that tended to see capitalism as evolving to a global level, with scholars differing on whether the contradictions of capitalism would indeed now lead to the destruction of this economic form (see Chapter 27, this volume). Others have blended stage models with world systems theories (e.g., Sanderson, 1988, 1995). Evolutionary stage models also can be found in critical theories (e.g., Habermas, 1979), and almost all postmodern theorists carry an evolutionary argument. Thus, evolutionary thinking is back in vogue within sociological theory.

But evolutionary theory involves much more than portrayals of societal movements from simple to complex forms. Early on, more purely biological arguments about evolutionary processes can be found in stage model theories (see also Chapter 21, this volume). For example, both Herbert Spencer (1874–1896) and Émile Durkheim (1893) offered ecological analyses more in tune with Darwinian theory, seeing competition among actors over resources as one of the driving forces behind specialization of activities (the sociological equivalent of the speciation of life forms). Such ecological theories have continued in both grand forms (e.g., Hawley, 1986; Turner, 1995) or more specialized incarnations within urban ecology (Berry & Kasarda, 1977; Hawley, 1950; Frisbie & Kasarda, 1988; Bidwell & Kasarda, 1985; Kasarda, 1972) and organizational ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1989).

Another form of evolutionary theorizing has been more controversial because it often appears to be reductionist (see Chapter 20). Variously labeled "sociobiology" and "evolutionary psychology," this theory posits that key patterns of social organization are ultimately explained by reference to genic fitness (e.g., Barash, 1977; van den Berghe, 1981). Genes seek to survive and maximize their fitness or ability to stay in the gene pool and so; the behaviors of individuals and by extension their patterns of sociocultural organization will reflect drives for fitness by genes. Most of the formal modeling in evolutionary psychology was borrowed from economics, with notions of maximizing utilities and even of equilibrium processes transferred to biological arguments about what genes do. When organisms cannot think, as is the case with insects, perhaps the models of sociobiology have some utility—to make a bad pun. But once animals are able to create complex social structures mediated by culture, the effects of genic fitness are diminished. There can be no doubt that humans created social structures to survive and reproduce themselves, but once created these structures and their cultures have emergent properties that drive behavior and patterns of social organization above and beyond the pressures exerted by genes to remain in the gene pool. Indeed, most explanations from sociobiology become "just so" stories about how a particular structure can be explained by genic pressures to maximize fitness. The problems with such stories is that they are easily constructed, and they almost always are post hoc and ad hoc. They can never be tested because they are fabricated after the fact, typically making vague references to what must have happened in the evolutionary past.

There is a final form of evolutionary theorizing that has received the least amount of attention. Humans evolved like any other animal, and so it is reasonable to ask how natural selection shaped the nature of this animal. By looking at humans' closest relatives, the Great Apes of Africa (chimpanzees and gorillas), it is possible to get some clues about human nature because the hominid ancestors of humans split from this line about 5 to 8 million years ago (see Maryanski & Turner, 1992; Turner, 2001). Since humans share over 98% of their genes with these primate relatives, it is possible to use comparative anatomy and evolutionary theory to get hints of what human nature is really like at the biological level. Most sociologists are very hostile to this kind of theorizing because it strikes at their core commitments to a "socially constructed" view of the world and because it hints at reductionism. Humans are, most sociologists would argue, the product of purely sociocultural forces, and hence, human behavior and social structures can only be understood in these terms. This kind of extremism will only hurt sociology because humans are obviously an animal with an evolutionary history, and this history does influence human behavior, interaction, and organization. And advances in biology will increasingly expose sociology to ridicule as we stick to the view that genes have nothing to do with human behavior. We need to be reductionists to draw insights from evolutionary biology, but most theorists in sociology remain hostile to any form of biological theorizing.

Utilitarian Theory

Adam Smith was a great sociologist, although we often allow economics claim him as its founder. But Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) was highly sociological and in many ways set the agenda for sociological theorizing in the 19th century, especially the concern for how highly differentiated social systems were to become integrated. But except for hints of utilitarian arguments in George Herbert Mead's (1934) pragmatism and in Georg Simmel's (1907) analysis of money, utilitarian theories were not prominent at the beginnings

of sociology. Of course, Karl Marx saw his great work on *Capital* (1867) as an effort to extend and correct Smith's *On the Wealth of Nations* (1776), and so in this sense Marx was a utilitarian. But the analysis of behavior in terms of individuals' efforts to realize utilities and avoid costs is for the most part a concern of later 20th-century theorizing. Moreover, this emphasis was often blended with behaviorism, another late 19th- and early 20th-century theory emphasizing that organisms, including humans, learn and retain in their repertoires those behaviors than provide reinforcement (Pavlov, 1928; Thorndike, 1932; Watson, 1913; Skinner, 1938).

The revival of this mode of theorizing occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with both behaviorist (e.g., Homans, 1961) and utilitarian (e.g., Coleman, 1966) variants that persist to this day (see Chapter 31, this volume). But perhaps the most important advances in these theories came with the development of exchange theory in a guise first proposed by Georg Simmel (1907). Peter Blau's (1964) approach sought to analyze the power dimension of all exchange relations at both the micro- and macro levels of social organization; and in seeking power as the central dynamic of exchange and in trying to posit isomorphism in the process influencing both individual and collective actors, Blau brought Simmel's ideas to the modern era. In a very different mode, but still inspired by Simmel, Richard Emerson (1962) blended a theory of power-dependence relations with network theory, seeing the properties of network structures organizing individual and collective actors as a reflection of efforts to balance power relations. While the Blau tradition has receded, and unfortunately so, the network approach has flowered within two basic traditions; one self-consciously following Emerson (see Chapter 31) and in another, often termed "elementary theory," that pursues the same questions but with a somewhat different vocabulary (e.g., Willer & Anderson, 1981).

In the last two decades of the 20th century, rational choice theory asserted itself as a prominent variant of utilitarian theory (see Chapter 29, this volume). Consciously borrowing from key assumptions from economics, this approach has sought to see sociocultural arrangements as the result of efforts by individuals to maximize their utilities (rewards less costs and investments). Indeed, much like the explanatory logic of sociobiology, an ad hoc and post hoc story is told about how a structure reflects the rational decisions of individuals (this similarity to sociobiology should not be surprising, of course, because sociobiology and rational choice theory have borrowed key ideas from economics). But unlike sociobiology, rational choice theories have proliferated, and they have been used to explain many diverse phenomena and even to make predictions as opposed to post hoc interpretations. The real question is how far such explanations can go in explaining social phenomena, which to my view reveal emergent forces above and beyond the utilitarian calculations of individuals (see Chapter 30 for a form of theorizing where extreme rationality is played down but where predictions can be made from key assumptions about how humans make assessments and comparisons).

Interactionist Theorizing

The legacy of George Herbert Mead (1934, 1938) has endured throughout the decades since his death, but it has been supplemented and extended in many directions. There is, of course, the symbolic interactionist tradition (e.g., Blumer, 1969; Stryker, 1980; Burke, 1991) that carries forth Mead's emphasis on the importance of self (see Chapter 11), but even this tradition has been blended with other perspectives, such as role theory (see Chapter 12), exchange theory (McCall & Simmons, 1966), action theory (see Chapter 14), and sociology of emotions (see Chapter 13). But there also is the Durkheimian (1912) tradition of interactionism

emphasizing rituals and emotional arousal, as can be seen in Erving Goffman's (1959, 1967) dramaturgical approach or Randall Collins' (1975) interaction ritual theory (see Chapter 24). While symbolic interactionists often claim dramaturgy to be within their tradition, its roots are entirely different (Durkheim's analysis of religion as opposed to G. H. Mead and American pragmatism); moreover, individuals are not considered to have stable and enduring self-conceptions as they are in all symbolic interactionist approaches.

In addition to the split between dramaturgy and symbolic interaction are more phenomenologically oriented approaches, ultimately coming to sociology from Edmund Husserl through Alfred Schutz (1932). Here emphasis is not on self, but on the practices used by individuals to create a sense of intersubjectivity or the illusion that they share a common world. Ethnomethodology has been the most robust of the phenomenological approaches, although this perspective has evolved into a rather routine analysis of conversations. Indeed, after the rather loud and shrill proclamations of early ethnomethodologists (e.g., Garfinkel, 1967; Handel, 1979) that the metaphysics of symbolic interactionists and in fact all of sociology were wrong, ethnomethodology has become a rather tame and routine enterprise, although creative theoretical work can still be found (see Chapter 15, this volume, for an example).

Probably the most interesting forefront within interactionist theorizing is the study of emotions. It is rather remarkable that George Herbert Mead never developed an analysis of emotions, and perhaps this fact explains why the study of human emotions did not really begin until the late 1970s (e.g., Heise, 1979; Hochschild, 1979; Kemper, 1979; Shott, 1979), but since this time, the leading edge of microsociology clearly has been the study of emotions. Some stay within the symbolic interactionist tradition as it has been extended, but most approaches bring in other theoretical perspectives in analyzing emotions, thereby providing a hook for integrating the concerns of symbolic interactionists with psychoanalysis (Turner, 1999), dramaturgy (Hochschild, 1979), gestalt-oriented theories (Heise, 1979; Smith-Lovin, 1990), evolutionary biology (Turner, 2001), power-status theory (Kemper & Collins, 1990), expectations states theory (Ridgeway, 1994), exchange theory (McCall & Simmons, 1966), network analysis (Markovsky & Lawler, 1994), conflict theory (Collins, 1984), and other approaches. Thus, the newfound concern with emotions has allowed interactionist theory to become less parochial and one dimensional (with the heavy emphasis on self and identity), and as a result, real integration of microsociology is currently underway (see Chapter 13, this volume for one approach that links psychoanalytical theory with symbolic interactionism).

At the microlevel, one of the most systematic approaches to the study of interaction is expectation-states theory, which ultimately extends assumptions from gestalt psychological to the analysis of the status structure of groups (Berger & Conner, 1969). While initially a rather narrow approach, studying the expectations associated with status in experimental groups, the approach has proliferated into many areas and to new topics (see Berger & Zelditch, 1985, 1998; Berger, Wagner, & Zelditch, 1989; Berger, Fisek, Norman, & Zelditch, 1977; Berger, Conner, & Fisek, 1974; Webster & Foschi, 1988, for reviews and anthologies); as this theoretical growth has occurred, the theory has become much more robust and general, analyzing the effects of expectations and the cultural beliefs that guide these expectations in diverse situations (see Chapter 16).

Structural and Structuralist Theory

Sociologists, of course, have always been concerned with social structure, and on the rise of "structuralism" as a broad intellectual movement has influenced some approaches in

sociology that can be labeled structural or structuralist. Structuralism comes from Émile Durkheim's (1893) sociology, as it was turned on its head by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1953), and while structuralism enjoyed a brief moment in the sun (perhaps less than the normal 15 minutes of fame), the imagery of structuralism still remains in much theory (Lemert, 1990). The view that there is an underlying structural form to surface empirical events is intriguing (regardless of whether or not this is seen to reside in the neurology of the brain); and it has inspired diverse perspectives, such as Anthony Giddens' (1984) structural theory, Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) analysis of habitus, and Robert Wuthnow's (1987) study of cultural meanings. None of these approaches goes so far as Lévi-Strauss (1953) or Noam Chomsky (1980) in seeing the biology of the brain as the critical source of the generative rules of structure, but the vocabulary and metaphors of structuralism are employed in these and a number of sociological perspectives.

Another kind of structuralism, also rooted in Durkheim, is network analysis, which has both European and American roots through psychology and social psychology but all converging in modern-day views of structure as consisting of matrices of ties among nodes (Mitchell, 1974). Here, concern is with the dynamics of various properties or forms of ties, such as strength, centrality, density, transitivity, equivalence, brokerage, and bridges. Much network analysis is atheoretical, with an overemphasis on the methodologies for analyzing networks rather than the explanatory principles explaining their dynamics. Yet, more theoretical works can be found (e.g., Burt, 1980, 1982, 1992) particularly so when network analysis is combined with exchange theory (see Molm & Cook, 1995, for a review).

Yet another form of structuralism focuses on how structural constraints influence rates of interaction. Here structures are seen as parameters that influence opportunities for interaction, with these opportunities determining general rates of contact among individuals. The most prominent theory along these lines is that produced by Peter Blau (see Chapter 17), but other approaches often reveal the same underlying imagery. For example, much network theory argues that the place in a network will influence opportunities for ties, and hence, rates of contact among actors. Similarly, ecological theories often carry this view of distribution of characteristics in social space as influencing rates of interaction (e.g., McPherson & Ranger-Moore, 1991).

A final form of structural analysis—general systems theory—seeks to portray phenomena in terms of systems of relationships. These relationships often are considered to hold across different domains of the universe—physical, biological, mechanical, and social. As a result, the goal is to develop a common set of concepts and principles than can account for the systemic properties of widely diverse phenomena. While the general systems movement once enjoyed great popularity in the late 1950s and 1960s, relatively few dedicated scholars now work in this tradition, despite its promise of unifying science (see Chapter 19, this volume).

CONCLUSION

Let me end where I began: Sociological theory is now so diverse that it is difficult to see any unity ever emerging. Sociologists do not agree on what is real, what our core problems are, what our epistemology is, and what our theories should look like. As is evident in the chapters in this volume, some very interesting if not brilliant work is being done by sociological theorists, but it would be difficult to see much unity among the theoretical positions argued in each chapter. Some perspectives overlap and/or draw upon similar traditions, but most go their own way, defining problems and performing analysis without great regard for the whole of activity that constitutes theory today.

I could have added another 10 or 15 perspectives to the volume; indeed, I have lost five or

six chapters along the way that were to be part of this volume. Thus, the chapters in this volume only begin to reflect the differentiated intellectual state of sociological theory today. For me, this diversity spells trouble for the discipline. True, this diversity also signals a certain vitality, but in the end, sciences must reveal consensus on problems and epistemology. Sociological theory does not have, nor will it ever have, such consensus; and there is danger here. If sociologists cannot speak with one voice, or at least many voices in a contrapuntal chorus, we will be overshadowed by those disciplines—such as economics—that can. We will not be considered useful in the halls of power, nor will our knowledge be respected by those inside or outside academia. Sociological knowledge has accumulated over the last half century (no doubt about this), but this knowledge has not been consolidated; as a result, it is difficult to see sociology as a cumulative science. Of course, many consider science a failed epistemology, and hence, there is no problem with the lack of cumulation that was a chimera anyway in the eyes of these critics. But if we are simply a discipline housed in the tower of babel (and babble), sociology will remain a weak discipline, operating at the fringes of academic and public life. Only with some degree of theoretical unity—on epistemology and problems—will sociology become an important discipline.

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