

CHAPTER ONE

THE STRUCTURE OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

1.1 What is Contemporary Sociological Theory?

Contemporary theories of sociology are, in a way, continuations of the classical tradition. Much of 19th century classical social theory has been expanded upon to create newer, more contemporary social theories such as multilineal theories of evolution (Neoevolutionism, Sociobiology, Theory of Modernization, Theory of Post-Industrial Society), and various strains of Neo-Marxism.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, social theory became most closely related to academic sociology while other related studies such as anthropology, philosophy, and social work branched out into their own disciplines. Such subjects as "philosophy of history" and other such multidisciplinary subject matters became part of social theory as taught under sociology. Contemporary sociological theories grew out of the strains of classical thought; and we trace the emergence of sociological theory in the early 1950s, especially with the work of Talcott Parsons (*The Social System, published in 1951*), who developed the Structural functional perspective in sociology which lasted strongest up to late 1960s. Out of the critics against structural functionalism came variants of Conflict theories, and other micro-level perspectives that stress free will, individual choice, subjective reasoning, and the importance of unpredictable events. Rational Choice Theory and Symbolic Interactionism furnish two such examples. Most modern sociologists deem there are no great unifying 'laws of history', but rather smaller, more specific, and more complex laws that govern society, hence an emphasis on microsociological perspectives.

1.2 Dimensions of Differences and Similarities

Contemporary sociological theories attempt at describing and explaining the social world from different vantage points. So complex is the social world to understand it easily, sociologists have developed several frameworks that would help us make out its workings. In what follows, let's have a discussion about a few dimensions on which modern day sociological theories differ and share. We can, for instance, mention at least four such issues: level of analysis, assumptions about human beings, methodological affiliation, and the goal of sociological inquiry.

a) Level of Analysis: Macro and Micro

Based on their level of analysis, sociological theories are grouped into those that focus on macro-social phenomena (thus called Macro-Sociological Theories), and those that emphasize micro-level social phenomena (thus called Micro-Sociological Theories). Macro-theories concentrate on large scale social structures, institutions, and the intricate interactions among the constituent elements of society. On the other hand, micro-sociological theories tend to focus on small-scale social phenomena such as on the ways individuals interact, and make their social world through social interaction. With respect to their level of analysis, Structural functionalism and Conflict theories are macro-level theories; and Symbolic Interactionism, Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, and Rational Choice theories are categorized under the 'micro-level theories'.

b) Assumptions about Human Beings: Structure and Agency; Values and Interests

Here also Contemporary sociological theories hold different assumptions about human nature; that is, about the nature of human beings, and the motivation for human social action. Human beings are *structurally determined* as viewed by Structural functionalism, and Conflict theories. The argument is that human beings are the products of society and their behavior is a reflection of the social structure in which they were brought up. In contrast, Symbolic interactionism and other micro-level theories assume that human beings are *active agents* that create their social world rather than being passive entities. On the other hand, on the question of *what motivates human action*, structural functionalism and Symbolic Interactionism hold similar view that *values* (shared assumptions of what is good or bad, desirable or undesirable that are internalized through socialization) are the basis for human action. Both see in social values a guide for human social action. However, Conflict theories of various types argue that human action is determined by *interests* (that the things people want to have). According to Conflict theories, society is composed of different groups having different interests; and human action is the product of a struggle to satisfy these interests (these can be power, property, or prestige).

c) Methodology: Deductivism and Inductivism

Deduction involves making assertions based on general assumptions, whereas Induction dictates making generalizations depending on specific observations. Depending on methodology, Structural functionalism and Conflict theory affiliate with the Deductive tradition, and Symbolic Interactionism fall on the side of Inductivism.

d) The Goal of Sociological Research: Explanation Vs Understanding and Interpretation

There is also a wide difference among modern sociological theories regarding the ultimate goal of sociological research. On the one hand, structural functionalism and conflict theories of various types claim the task of sociological investigation to be explanatory in its end. Proponents of these theories argue that sociologists should conduct such investigations for the purpose of uncovering social factors that explain the phenomena under consideration and their interrelationships. Thus, for them, discovering so-called universalistic social laws that cause currently or otherwise social phenomena is the goal aimed to be achieved by social research.

On the other hand, micro-level theorists express their contention stating that the goal of sociological research should be oriented towards understanding the daily encounters and experiences of social actors and interactions between or among them. Besides, sociologists are expected to interpret the behavior of actors in relation to specific social contexts.

PART I: MACRO-SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

CHAPTER TWO

2. STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

2.1 Theoretical Background

Robert Nisbet, a contemporary sociologist, argued that structural functionalism was “without any doubt, the single most significant body of theory in the social sciences in the 20th century” (cited in Ritzer, 2003:230). Kingsley Davis took the position that structural functionalism was, for all intents and purposes, synonymous with sociology while discussing theoretical sociology.

Despite its undoubted hegemony in the two decades after World War II, structural functionalism has declined in importance as a sociological theory. Some of its proponents desperately felt that functionalism as an explanatory theory was dead and continued efforts to use functionalism as a theoretical explanation should be abandoned in favor of more promising theoretical perspectives. Others (like Demerath and Peterson, 1967), in contrast, took a more positive view, arguing that structural functionalism is not a passing fad. However, they admitted that it is likely to evolve into another sociological theory, just as this theory evolved out of the earlier organicism. The rise of neo-functionalism seems to support this optimism.

In structural functionalism, you should note that the terms *structural* and *functional* need not be used in conjunction, although they are typically conjoined. We could study the structures of society without being concerned with their functions (or consequences) for other structures. Similarly, we could examine the functions of a variety of social processes that may not take a structural form. Still, the concern for both elements characterizes structural functionalism; i.e., with study of social processes in terms of their functions and their functional relations with other structures in a society. Although structural functionalism takes various forms, *societal functionalism* is the dominant approach among structural functionalists. The primary concern of societal functionalism is the large-scale societal structures and institutions of society, their interrelationships, and their constraining effects on actors.

we can treat Structural functionalism as a broad perspective in the social sciences which addresses social structure in terms of the function of its constituent elements, namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, regards these aspects (elements) of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole.

The perspective was implicit in the thought of the original sociological positivist, Auguste Comte, who stressed the need for cohesion after the social malaise of the French Revolution of 1789. It was later presented in the work of Emile Durkheim, who developed a full theory of organic solidarity, again informed by positivism, or the quest for "social facts."

Although functionalism shares a theoretical affinity with the empirical method, theorists such as Bronisław Malinowski and Talcott Parsons are to some extent antipositivist. Similarly, while functionalism has an affinity with "grand theory" (like the Systems Theory of Niklas Luhmann), one may distinguish between structural and non-structural varieties. It is also simplistic to equate the perspective directly with political conservatism. Functionalism has been associated with thinkers as diverse as the post-modernist philosopher Michel Foucault. In the most basic terms, it simply emphasizes "the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system."

It has also been suggested that structural functionalism has historical affinity with the application of the scientific method in social theory and research. As you would remember from the discussions about the origin of sociological theory in the preceded module, sociological positivism asserts that one can study the social world in the same ways as one studies the physical world, and that social laws are directly and objectively observable. Certain contemporary functionalists have, in contrast, rejected the possibility of empirical methods in sociology. Nevertheless, structural functionalists are broadly united in the view, firstly, that rules and regulations (both informal norms and formal laws) are necessary to organize a society effectively and, secondly, that social institutions (both traditional and governmental) form the necessary constituent parts of the social structure.

Although Comte may be defined as a structural-functionalism, the perspective was developed primarily through the work of Emile Durkheim, who emphasized the central role that moral consensus plays in maintaining social order and creating an equilibrium or a normal state of society. Durkheim was concerned with the question of how certain societies maintain internal stability and survive over time. He proposed that some societies tend to be segmented, with equivalent parts held together by shared values, common symbols or, (as his nephew Marcel Mauss held) systems of exchanges. In modern, complicated societies, members perform very different tasks, resulting in a strong interdependence. Based on the metaphor of an organism in which many parts function together to sustain the whole, Durkheim argued that these societies are held together by mechanical and organic solidarity respectively.

These views were upheld by Radcliffe-Brown, who, following Auguste Comte, believed that society constitutes a separate "level" of reality, distinct from both biological and inorganic matter. Explanations of social phenomena had, therefore, to be constructed within this level, individuals being merely transient occupants of comparatively stable social roles.

Durkheim proposed that most stateless, "primitive" societies, lacking strong centralized institutions, are based on an association of corporate-descent groups. Structural functionalism also took on Malinowski's argument that the basic building block of society is the nuclear family, and that the clan is an outgrowth, not *vice versa*.

The central concern of structural functionalism, here, is a continuation of the Durkheimian task of explaining the apparent stability and internal cohesion needed by societies to endure over time. Societies are seen as coherent, bounded and fundamentally relational constructs

that function like organisms, with their various parts (or social institutions) working together in an unconscious, quasi-automatic fashion toward achieving an overall social equilibrium. All social and cultural phenomena are, therefore, seen as functional in the sense of working together, and are effectively deemed to have "lives" of their own. They are primarily analyzed in terms of this function. The individual is significant not in and of himself but rather in terms of his status, his position in patterns of social relations, and the behaviors associated with his status. The social structure, then, is the network of statuses connected by associated roles and, as you might have already ascertained the primary emphasis of structural functionalists.

2.3 Talcott Parsons's Structural Functionalism

Over the course of his life, Talcott Parsons did a great deal of theoretical work. There are important differences between his early works and his later works. In this section, we will deal with his later, structural-functional theorizing.

AGIL Paradigm

Talcott Parsons defined a *function* as "a complex of activities directed towards meeting a need or needs of the system". Using this definition, Parsons believes that there are four functional imperatives that are necessary for (characteristic of) all systems: adaptation (A), goal attainment (G), integration (I), and latency, or pattern maintenance (L). Together, these four functional imperatives are known as the AGIL scheme constituted by taking the first letter of each functional prerequisite. In order to survive, hence, a system must perform these four functions:

- ***Adaptation***: A system must cope with external situational exigencies. It must adapt to its environment and adapt the environment to its needs.
- ***Goal Attainment***: A system must define and achieve its primary goals.
- ***Integration***: A system must regulate the interrelationship of its component parts. It must also manage the relationship among the other three functional imperatives (A, G, L).
- ***Latency (Pattern Maintenance)***: A system must furnish, maintain, and renew both the motivation of individuals and the cultural patterns that create and sustain the motivation.

Parsons designed the AGIL scheme to be used at *all* levels in his theoretical system from the individual to the society or community of societies. The *behavioral organism* is the action system that handles the adaptation function by adjusting to and transforming the external world. The *personality system* performs the goal-attainment function by defining system goals and mobilizing resources to attain them. The *social system* copes with the integration function by controlling its component parts. Finally, the *cultural system* performs the latency function by providing actors with the norms and values that motivate for action. The AGIL scheme would be clearer as we expose his ideas in the subsequent sections.

The Action System

It is obvious that Parsons had a clear notion of *levels* of social analysis as well as their interrelationship. The hierarchical arrangement is clear, and the levels are integrated in Parsons's system in two ways. First, each of the lower levels provides the conditions, the energy, needed for the higher levels. Second, the higher levels control those below them in the hierarchy.

In terms of the environments of the action system, the lowest level (represented by the individual), the physical and organic environment, involves the nonsymbolic aspects of the human body, its anatomy and physiology. The highest level, the ultimate reality, has a metaphysical flavor, but Parsons is not referring to the supernatural so much as the universal tendency for societies to address symbolically the uncertainties, concerns, and tragedies of human existence that challenge the meaningfulness of social organization.

The heart of Parsons's work is found in his four action system. In the assumptions that Parsons made regarding his action systems, we encounter the problem of order that was his overwhelming concern and that has become a major source of criticism of his work. The Hobbesian problem of order, what prevents a social war of all against all, was not answered to Parsons's satisfaction by the earlier philosophers. Parsons found his answer to the problem of order in structural functionalism, which operates in his view with the following set of assumptions:

1. Systems have the property of order and interdependence of parts;
2. Systems tend toward self-maintaining order, or equilibrium;
3. The system may be static or involved in an ordered process of change;
4. The nature of one part of the system has an implication on the form that the other parts can take;
5. Systems maintain boundaries with their environments;
6. Allocation and integration are two fundamental processes necessary for a given state of equilibrium of a system; and,
7. Systems tend toward self-maintenance involving the maintenance of boundaries and of the relationships of the parts to the whole, control of environmental variations, and control of tendencies to change the system from within.

These assumptions led Parsons to make the analysis of the *ordered* structure of society his first priority. In doing so, he did little with the issue of social change, at least until late in his career. Hence, generally speaking, Parsonian functionalism has been treated as a conservative force with vested interest in maintaining the status-quo undermining changes from within the system by treating it as pathological.

In reading about the four action systems, you should keep in mind that they do not exist in the real world but are, rather, analytical tools for analyzing the real world—they are theoretical abstractions rather than descriptions of empirical phenomena.

Social System: Parsons was heavily influenced by the works of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, synthesizing much of their work into his own action theory, which he developed based on the system-theoretical concept and the methodological principle of voluntary action. Parsons's conception of the social system begins at the micro level with interaction between ego and alter ego, defined as the most elementary form of the social system. He spent little time analyzing this level, although he did argue that features of this interaction system are present in the more complex forms taken by the social system. Parsons defined the social system, thus:

A social system consists in a plurality of individual actors interacting with each other in a situation which has at least a physical environmental aspect, actors who are motivated in terms of a tendency to the "optimization of gratification" and whose relation to their situations, including each other, is defined and mediated in terms of a system of culturally structured and shared symbols.

This definition seeks to define a social system in terms of many of the key concepts in Parsons's work actors, interaction, environment, optimization of gratification, and culture. He held that the social system is made up of the actions of individuals. His starting point, accordingly, is the interaction between two individuals faced with a variety of choices about how they might act, choices that are influenced and constrained by a number of physical and social factors.

Despite his commitment to viewing the social system as a system of interaction, Parsons did not take interaction as his fundamental unit in the study of the social system. Rather, he used *status-role* complex as the basic unit of the system. This is neither an aspect of actors nor an aspect of interaction, but rather a *structural* component of the social system. *Status* refers to a structural position within the social system, and *role* is what the actor does in such a position, seen in the context of its functional significance for the larger system. As behaviors are repeated in more interactions, and these expectations are entrenched or institutionalized, a role is created. Parsons defines a "role" as the normatively regulated participation "of a person in a concrete process of social interaction with specific, concrete role-partners." Although any individual, theoretically, can fulfill any role, one is expected to conform to the norms governing the nature of the role he/she fulfils. The actor is viewed not in terms of thoughts and actions but instead as nothing more than a bundle of statuses and roles.

In his analysis of the social system, Parsons was interested primarily in its structural components. In addition to a concern with the status-role, Parsons was interested in such large-scale components of social systems as collectivities, norms, and values. In his analysis of the social system, however, Parsons was not simply a structuralist but also a functionalist. He, thus, delineated a number of the functional prerequisites of a social system. First, social systems must be structured so that they operate compatibly with other systems. Second, in order to survive, the social system must have the requisite support from other systems. Third, the system must meet a significant proportion of the needs of its actors. Fourth, the system must elicit adequate participation from its members. Fifth, it must have at least a minimum of

control over potentially disruptive behavior. Sixth, if conflict becomes sufficiently disruptive, it must be controlled. Finally, a social system requires a language in order to survive.

It is clear in Parsons's discussion of the functional prerequisites of the social system that his focus was large-scale systems and their relationship to one another (societal functionalism). Even when he talked about actors, it was from the point of view of the system. Also, the discussion reflects Parsons's concern with the maintenance of order within the social system.

Actors and the Social System: However, Parsons did not completely ignore the issue of the relationship between actors and social structures in his discussion of the social system. In fact, he called the integration of value patterns and need dispositions "the fundamental dynamic theorem of sociology". Given his central concern with the social system, of key importance in this integration are the processes of internalization and socialization. That is, Parsons was interested in the ways that the norms and values of a system are transferred to the actors within the system. In a successful socialization process, he argued, these norms and values are internalized; that is, they become part of the actors' "conscience". As a result, in pursuing their own interests, the actors are in fact serving the interests of the system as a whole. The combination of value-orientation patterns, which is acquired by the actor in socialization, must, in a very important degree, be a function of the fundamental role structures and dominant values of the social system.

In general, Parsons assumed that actors usually are passive recipients in the socialization process. Children learn not only how to act but also the norms and values, the morality, of society. Hence, socialization is conceptualized under structural functionalism, as a conservative process in which need-dispositions bind children to the social system, and it provides the means by which the need-dispositions can be satisfied. There is little or no room for creativity; the need for gratification ties children to the system as it exists. Parsons sees socialization as a lifelong experience. Because the norms and values inculcated in childhood tend to be very general, they do not prepare children for the various specific situations that they encounter in adulthood. Thus, socialization must be supplemented throughout the life cycle with a series of more specific socializing experiences. Despite this need in later life, the norms and values learned in childhood tend to be stable and, with a little gentle reinforcement, tend to remain in force throughout life.

Despite the conformity induced by lifelong socialization, Parsons noted that there is a wide range of individual variation in the system. The question is: *Why is this normally not a major problem for the social system, given its need for order?* For one thing, a number of social control mechanisms can be employed to induce conformity. However, as far as Parsons was concerned, social control is strictly a second line of defense. A system runs best when social control is used only carefully. For another thing, the system must be able to tolerate some variation, some deviance. A flexible social system is stronger than a brittle one that accepts no deviation. Finally, the social system should provide a wide range of role opportunities that allow different personalities to express themselves without the integrity of the system.

For Parsons, socialization and social control are the main mechanisms that allow the social system to maintain its equilibrium. A society where there is no conflict, where everyone knows what is expected of him, and where these expectations are consistently met, is in a perfect state of equilibrium which is also a desirable one. The key processes for Parsons in attaining this equilibrium are socialization and social control. Socialization is important because it is the mechanism for transferring the accepted norms and values of society to individuals within the system. Perfect socialization occurs when these norms and values are completely internalized, when they become part of the individual's personality. Modest amounts of individuality and deviance are accommodated, but more extreme forms must be met by re-equilibrating mechanisms.

Note here that Parsons's main interest was the system as a whole rather than the actor in the system how the system controls the actor, not on how the actor creates and maintains the system. This reflects Parsons's commitment to a structural—functional orientation.

Society: Although the idea of a social system encompasses all types of collectivities, one specific and particularly important social system is *society*, a relatively self-sufficient collectivity the members of which are able to satisfy all their individual and collective needs and to live entirely within its framework. As a structural functionalist, Parsons distinguished among four structures, or subsystems, in society in terms of the functions (AGIL) they perform (see the figure below).

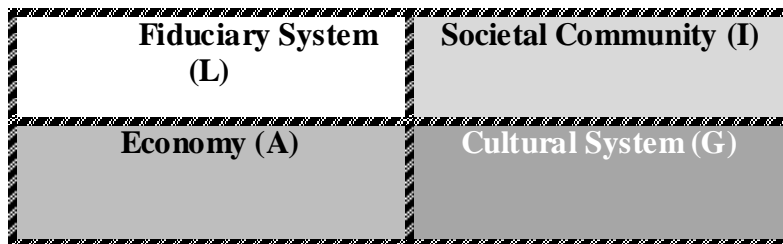


Figure 1: *Society, Its Subsystems, and the Functional Imperatives*

Parsons, hence, identified the *economy* as the subsystem that performs the function for society of adapting to the environment through labor, production, distribution and exchange. Through such work, the economy adapts the environment to society's needs, and it helps society adapt to these external realities. The *polity* (or political system) on the other hand performs the function of goal attainment by pursuing societal objectives and mobilizing actors and resources to that end. Besides, the *fiduciary system* (for example, in the schools, the family) handles the latency function by transmitting culture (norms and values) to actors and allowing it to be internalized by them. Finally, the integration function is performed by the *societal community* (for example, the law, religion and morality), which coordinates the various components of society.

As important as the structures of the social system were to Parsons, the cultural system was most important. In fact, as we discussed earlier, the cultural system stood at the top of Parsons's action system, and Parsons labeled himself a "cultural determinist", since the

cultural system determines the pattern or form of interaction among groups and individuals in a society by defining the contents of most interactional systems and defining the character of the social system.

Cultural System: Parsons conceived of culture as the major force binding the various elements of the social world, or, in his own words, the action system. Culture mediates interaction among actors and integrates the personality and the social systems. Culture has the peculiar capacity to become, at least in part, a component of the other systems. Thus, in the social system culture is embedded in norms and values, and in the personality system it is internalized by the actor. But the cultural system is not simply a part of other systems; but also has a separate existence in the form of the social stock of knowledge, symbols, and ideas. These aspects of the cultural system are available to the social and personality systems, but they do not become part of them.

Parsons defined the cultural system, as he did his other systems, in terms of its relationship to other action systems. Thus *culture* is seen as a patterned, ordered system of symbols that are objects of orientation to actors, internalized aspects of the personality system, and institutionalized patterns in the social system. Because it is largely symbolic and subjective, culture is readily transmitted from one system to another. Culture can move from one social system to another through diffusion and from one personality system to another through learning and socialization. However, the symbolic (subjective) character of culture also gives it another characteristic; the ability to control other action systems. This is one of the reasons that Parsons came to view himself as a cultural determinist.

Personality System: The personality system (an individual's psychic and action orientations) is controlled not only by the cultural system but also by the social system. That is not to say that Parsons did not accord some independence to the personality system. He viewed that while the main content of the structure of the personality system is derived from social systems and culture through socialization, the personality becomes an independent system through its relations to its own organism and through the uniqueness of its own life experience; it is not a mere epiphenomenon.

Parsons defined *personality* as the organized system of orientation and motivation of action of the individual actor. The basic component of the personality is the "need-disposition", which is defined as the most significant units of motivation of action. Need-dispositions are different from drives, which are innate tendencies physiological energy that makes action possible. In other words, drives are better seen as part of the biological organism. Need-dispositions are, then, defined as these same tendencies when they are not innate but acquired through the process of action itself; they are drives that are shaped by the social setting.

Need-dispositions impel actors to accept or reject objects presented in the environment or to seek out new objects if the ones that are available do not adequately satisfy need-dispositions. Parsons differentiated among three basic types of need-dispositions. The first type impels actors to seek love, approval, and so forth from their social relationships. The second type includes internalized values that lead actors to observe various cultural

standards. Thirdly, there are the role expectations that lead actors to give and get appropriate responses.

As you can see, Parsons's view of individual personality gives a very passive image of actors. Parsons's actors seem to be either impelled by drives, dominated by culture, or, more usually, shaped by a combination of drives and culture. A passive personality system is clearly a weak link in an integrated theory, and Parsons seemed to be aware of it. On various occasions, he tried to endow the personality system with some creativity.

Behavioral Organism: Though Parsons included the behavioral organism as one of the four action systems, he had very little to say about it. It is included because it is a source of energy for the rest of the systems. Although it is based on genetic constitution, its organization is affected by the process of conditioning and learning that occur during the individual's life. The behavioral organism is clearly a residual system in Parsons's work, but at the minimum Parsons is to be lauded for including it as part of his sociology, if for no other reason than that he anticipated the interest in sociobiology and the sociology of the body by some sociologists.

Change and Dynamism in Parsonsian Theory: Parsons's work with conceptual tools such as the four action systems and the functional imperatives led to the accusation that he offered a structural theory that was unable to deal with social change. Parsons had long been sensitive to this charge arguing that although a study of change was necessary, it must be preceded by a study of structure. But by the 1960s, he could resist the attacks no longer and made a major shift in his work to the study of social change, particularly the study of societal evolution.

Evolutionary Theory: Parsons's general orientation to the study of social change was shaped by biology. To deal with this process, Parsons developed what he called "a paradigm of evolutionary change". The first component of that paradigm is the process of *differentiation*. Parsons assumed that any society is composed of a series of subsystems that differ in terms of both their *structure* and their *functional* significance for the larger society. As society evolves, new subsystems are differentiated. This is not enough; however, they also must be more adaptive than earlier subsystems. Thus, the essential aspect of Parsons's evolutionary paradigm was the idea of *adaptive upgrading*. Parsons describes this process as follows:

If differentiation is to yield a balanced, more evolved system, each newly differentiated substructure must have increased adaptive capacity for performing its *primary* function, as compared to performance of that function in the previous, more diffuse structure.... We may call this process the *adaptive upgrading* aspect of the evolutionary change cycle.

This is a highly positive model of social change. It assumes that as society evolves, it grows generally better able to cope with its problems. In contrast, in Marxian theory, as we will see shortly, social change leads to the eventual destruction of capitalist society. For this reason,

among others, Parsons is often thought of as a very conservative sociological theorist. In addition, while he did deal with change, he tended to focus on the positive aspects of social change in the modern world rather than on its negative side.

On the other hand, Parsons argued that the process of differentiation leads to a new set of problems of integration for society. As subsystems proliferate, the society is transformed with new problems in coordinating the operations of these units.

A society undergoing evolution must move from a system of ascription to one of achievement. A wider array of skills and abilities is needed to handle the more diffuse subsystems. The generalized abilities of people must be freed from their ascriptive bonds so that they can be utilized by society. Most generally, this means that groups formerly excluded from contributing to the system must be freed for inclusion as full members of society.

Finally, the *value* system of the society as a whole must undergo change as social structures and functions grow increasingly differentiated. However, since the new system is more diverse, it is harder for the value system to encompass it. Thus, a more differentiated society requires a value system that is couched at a higher level of generality in order to legitimize the wider variety of goals and functions of its subunits. However, this process of generalization of values often does not proceed smoothly as it meets resistance from groups committed to their own narrow value systems.

Evolution proceeds through a variety of cycles, but no general process affects all societies equally. Some societies may foster evolution, whereas others may be so beset with internal conflicts or other handicaps that they impede the process of social evolution, or they may even deteriorate. What most interested Parsons were societies in which developmental breakthroughs occur, since he believed that once they occurred, the process of evolution would follow his general evolutionary model. Although Parsons conceived of evolution as occurring in stages, he was careful to avoid a unilinear evolutionary theory.

2.4 Robert Merton' Structural Functionalism

While Talcott Parsons is the most important structural-functional theorist, his student Robert Merton authored some of the most important statements on structural functionalism in sociology. Merton fundamentally agreed with Parsons' theory. However, he acknowledged that it was problematic. Believing that it was too generalized, he criticized some of the more extreme and indefensible aspects of structural functionalism. But, equally important, his new insights helped to give structural functionalism a continuing usefulness.

Although both Merton and Parsons are associated with structural functionalism, there are important differences between them. For one thing, while Parsons advocated the creation of grand, overarching theories, Merton tended to emphasize more limited, middle-range theories rather than a grand theory. For another, Merton was more favorable towards Marxian theories than Parsons was. In fact, Merton and some of his students (especially Alvin Gouldner) can be seen as having pushed structural functionalism more to the left politically.

A Structural-Functional Model: Merton criticized what he saw as the three basic postulates of functional analysis as it was developed by anthropologists such as Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. The first is the postulate of the functional unity of society. This postulate holds that all standardized social and cultural beliefs and practices are functional for society as a whole as well as for individuals in society. This view implies that the various parts of a social system must show a high level of integration. However, Merton maintained that although it may be true of small, primitive societies, the generalization cannot be extended to larger, more complex societies.

Universal functionalism is the second postulate. That is, it is argued that *all* standardized social and cultural forms and structures have positive functions. Merton argued that this contradicts what we find in the real world. It is clear that not every structure, custom, idea, belief, and so forth has positive functions. For example, rabid nationalism can be highly dysfunctional in a world of proliferating nuclear arms.

Third is the postulate of indispensability. The argument here is that all standardized aspects of society not only have positive functions but also represent indispensable parts of the working whole. This postulate leads to the idea that all structures and functions are functionally necessary for society. No other structures and functions could work quite as well as those that are currently found within society. Merton's criticism, following Parsons, was that we must at least be willing to admit that there are various structural and functional alternatives to be found within society.

Merton's position was that all these functional postulates rely on nonempirical assertions based on abstract, theoretical systems. At a minimum, it is the responsibility of the sociologist to examine each empirically. Merton's belief that empirical tests, not theoretical assertions, are crucial to functional analysis led him to develop his "paradigm" of functional analysis as a guide to the integration of theory and research.

Merton made it clear from the outset that structural-functional analysis focuses on groups, organizations, societies, and cultures. He stated that any object that can be subjected to structural-functional analysis must represent a standardized (that is, patterned and repetitive) item. He had in mind such things as "social roles, institutional patterns, social processes, cultural patterns, culturally patterned emotions, social norms, group organization, social structure, devices for social control, etc."

Early structural functionalists tended to focus almost entirely on the *functions* of one social structure or institution for another. However, in Merton's view, early analysts tended to confuse the subjective motives of individuals with the functions of structures or institutions. The focus of structural functionalist should be on social functions rather than on individual motives. *Functions*, according to Merton, are defined as those observed consequences which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system. However, there is a clear ideological bias when one focuses only on adaptation or adjustment, he warns, for they are always positive consequences. It is important to note that one social fact can have negative consequences for another social fact. To rectify this serious omission in early structural

functionalism, Merton developed the idea of a *dysfunction*. Just as structures or institutions could contribute to the maintenance of other parts of the social system, they also could have negative consequences for them in terms of creating instability and disequilibrium.

Merton also posited the idea of *nonfunctions*, which he defined as consequences that are simply irrelevant to the system under consideration. Included here might be social forms that are *survivals* from earlier historical times. Although they may have had positive or negative consequences in the past, they have no significant effect on contemporary society.

To help answer the question of whether positive functions outweigh dysfunctions, or vice versa, Merton developed the concept of *net balance*. However, we never can simply add up positive functions and dysfunctions and objectively determine which outweighs the other, because the issues are so complex and based on so much subjective judgment that they cannot easily be calculated and weighed. The usefulness of Merton's concept comes from the way it orients the sociologist to the question of relative significance.

To cope with problems like this, Merton added the idea that there must be levels of *functional analysis*. Functionalists had generally restricted themselves to analysis of the society as a whole. But, Merton made it clear that analysis could also be done on an organization, institution, or group.

Merton also introduced the concepts of *manifest* and *latent* functions. These two terms have also been important additions to functional analysis. In simple terms, *manifest functions* are those that are the intended effects of social facts, whereas *latent functions* are the unintended ones. The manifest function of slavery, for example, was to increase the economic productivity of the South, but it also had the latent function of providing a vast underclass that served to increase the social status of American southern whites, both rich and poor before the civil war. This idea is related to another of Merton's concepts *unanticipated consequences*. Actions have both intended and unintended consequences. Although everyone is aware of the intended consequences, sociological analysis is required to uncover the unintended consequences; indeed, to some, this is the very essence of sociology.

Merton made it clear that unanticipated consequences and latent functions are not the same. A latent function is one type of unanticipated consequence, one that is functional for the designated system. But there are two other types of unanticipated consequences: "those that are dysfunctional for the designated system, and these comprise the latent dysfunctions", and "those which are irrelevant to the system which they affect neither functionally nor dysfunctionally, hence, non-functional consequences".

In a further clarification of functional theory, Merton pointed out that a structure may be dysfunctional for the system as a whole and yet may continue to exist. One might make a good case that discrimination against Blacks, females, and other minority groups is dysfunctional for a society, yet it may continue to exist because it is functional for a part of the social system. For example, discrimination against females is generally functional for males. However, these forms of discrimination are not without some dysfunctions, even for

the group for which they are functional. Males do suffer from discriminating against females. Similarly, Whites are hurt by their discriminatory behavior toward Blacks. One could argue that these forms of discrimination adversely affect those who discriminate by keeping vast numbers of people unproductive and/or underproductive and by increasing likelihood of social conflict.

Merton contended that not all structures are indispensable to the workings of the social system. Some parts of a social system *can* be eliminated. This contribution of Merton helps functional theory overcome another of its conservative biases. By recognizing that some structures are expendable, Merton's functionalism opens the way for meaningful social change. A society, for example, could continue to exist, and even be improved, by the elimination of discrimination against females.

As you can well see, Merton's clarifications are of great utility to sociologists who wish to perform structural-functional analyses. Let us see how Merton himself tried to study the social fact called *anomie* using his structural-functionalism. His study of *anomie* has been considered as one of his best-known contributions to structural functionalism, indeed all of sociology—Merton's analysis of the relationship between culture, structure, and anomie.

Social Structure and Anomie

Merton defines culture as that organized set of normative values governing behavior which is common to members of a designated society or group. He also defined social structure as that organized set of social relationships in which members of the society or group are variously implicated. Anomie occurs when there is an acute disjunction between the cultural norms and goals and the socially structured capacities of members of the group to act in accord with them. That is, because of their position in the social structure of society, some people are unable to act in accord with normative values. The culture calls for some type of behavior that the social structure prevents from occurring.

For example, in American society, the culture places great emphasis on material success. However, by their position within the social structure, many people are prevented from achieving such success. If one is born into the lower socioeconomic classes and as a result is able to acquire, at best, only a high school degree, then one's chances of achieving economic success in the generally accepted way are slim or nonexistent. Under such circumstances, anomie can be said to exist, and as a result, there is a tendency towards deviant behavior. In this context, deviance often takes the form of alternative, unacceptable, and sometimes illegal means of achieving economic success. Thus, becoming a drug dealer or a prostitute in order to achieve economic success is an example of deviance generated by the disjunction between cultural values and social-structural means of attaining those values. In such a way, Merton demonstrated how one could employ structural functionalism to explain crime and deviance.

Merton's theory of deviance is derived from Durkheim's idea of anomie. It is central in explaining how internal changes can occur in a system. For Merton, hence, anomie means a discontinuity between cultural goals and the accepted methods available for reaching them.

Merton believes that there are five situations facing an actor:

- **Conformity:** when an individual has the means and desire to achieve the cultural goals socialized into him; or
- **Innovation:** when an individual strives to attain the accepted cultural goals but chooses to do so in novel or unaccepted method; or
- **Ritualism:** when an individual continues to do things as proscribed by society but forfeits the achievement of the goals; or
- **Retreatism:** (which is the) rejection of both the means and the goals of society; or
- **Rebellion:** (which is) a combination of the rejection of societal goals and means and a substitution of other goals and means.

Thus, change can occur internally in society through either innovation or rebellion. It is true that society will attempt to control these individuals and negate the changes. But, as the innovation or rebellion builds momentum, society will eventually adapt or face dissolution.

Note here that, in this example of structural functionalism, Merton is looking at social and cultural structures, but he is not focally concerned with the functions of those structures. Rather, consistent with his functional paradigm, he is mainly concerned with dysfunctions, in this case anomie. More specifically, Merton links anomie with deviance and thereby is arguing that disjunctions between culture and social structure have the dysfunctional consequence of leading to deviance within society.

It is worth noting that implied in Merton's work on anomie is a critical attitude toward social stratification (for example, for blocking the means of some to socially desirable goals). Thus, contrasting enough, while Davis and Moore wrote approvingly of a stratified society, Merton's work indicates that structural functionalists can be critical of social stratification.

The last of Merton's important contributions to functionalism was his distinction between manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions refer to the conscious intentions of actors; latent functions are the objective consequences of their actions, which are often unintended. Merton used the example of the Hopi rain dance to show that sometimes an individual's understanding of their motive for an action may not fully explain why that action continues to be performed. Sometimes actions fulfill a function of which the actor is unaware, and this is the latent function of an action.

2.5 Social Change and Structural Functionalism: A Commentary

Talcott Parsons analyzed society as having a complex system of equilibriums. But, it is a distortion when it is claimed that Parsons believed that they would be in some kind of "perfect" balance or that a disturbed equilibrium would return "quickly" to its normal position. He never argued or claimed anything of that kind. In contrast, Parsons always argued that for most societies the value-integrals of society (and, therefore, also their

relatively state of "equilibrium") is generally importantly incomplete and in a modern society it is utopian, Parsons maintained, to think that there can be anything except approaching a "complete" system-integration. Indeed, Parsons argued that the built-in value-ambivalence and tensions which characterizes almost all cultural systems will make the idea of "optimal" social integration" a sheer utopia. Parsons never claimed that one part of the societal system "must" adapt to the other; there does not exist such a "must". However, he maintained that insufficient levels of system adaption would have various kinds of "problematic" consequences depending on the exact historical situation. Naturally, if a society suffers from a severe sum of integral malfunctionings, its survival will ultimately be at stake. After all, many Empires and Civilizations have vanished and disappeared as history has marched along largely due to their failure to adapt to the changes in their systems.

2.6 Criticisms against Structural Functionalism

1. In the 1960s, functionalism was criticized for being unable to account for social change, or structural contradictions and conflict (and, thus, was often called "consensus theory"). The refutation of this criticism of functionalism, that it is static and has no concept of change, has already been articulated above, concluding that while Parsons' theory allows for change, it is an orderly process of change (Parsons, 1961:38), a moving equilibrium. Therefore, referring to Parsons' theory of society as static is inaccurate. It is true that it does place emphasis on equilibrium and the maintenance or quick return to social order, but this is a product of the time in which Parsons was writing (post-World War II, and the start of the Cold War). Society was in upheaval and fear abounded. At that time, social order was crucial. Hence, such was reflected in Parsons' tendency to promote equilibrium and social order rather than social change.

Furthermore, Durkheim favored a radical form of guild socialism along with functionalist explanations hence, suggesting the potential for radical change within the theoretical framework of structural functionalism. Also, Marxism, as we will see in the next chapter, while acknowledging social contradictions, still uses functionalist explanations. Parsons' evolutionary theory describes the differentiation and reintegration systems and subsystems and, thus, at least temporary conflict before reintegration (ibid). "The fact that functional analysis can be seen by some as inherently conservative and by others as inherently radical suggests that it may be *inherently* neither one nor the other" (Merton 1957).

2. Stronger criticisms include the epistemological argument that functionalism is teleological, that is, it attempts to describe social institutions solely through their effects and thereby does not explain the cause of those effects. However, Parsons drew directly on many of Durkheim's concepts in creating his theory. Certainly, Durkheim was one of the first theorists to explain a phenomenon with reference to the function it served for society. He said, "the determination of function is necessary for the complete explanation of the phenomena" (cited in Coser, 1977). However, Durkheim made a clear distinction between historical and functional analysis, saying, "when...the explanation of a social phenomenon is undertaken, we must seek separately the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfills"(Ibid). If Durkheim made this distinction, then it is unlikely that Parsons did not.

However, Merton does explicitly state that functional analysis does not seek to explain why the action happened in the first instance, but why it continues to exist or is reproduced. He says that “latent functions go far towards explaining the continuance of the pattern”. Therefore, it can be argued that functionalism does not explain the original cause of a phenomenon with reference to its effect, and is therefore, not teleological.

3. Another criticism describes the ontological argument that society can not have "needs" as a human being does. Besides, even if society does have needs, they need not be met. Anthony Giddens argues that functionalist explanations may all be rewritten as historical accounts of individual human actions and consequences.

4. A further criticism directed at functionalism is that it contains no sense of agency, that individuals are seen as puppets, acting as their role requires. Yet, Holmwood states that the most sophisticated forms of functionalism are based on “a highly developed concept of action” (2005), and as was explained above, Parsons took as his starting point the individual and their actions. His theory did not, however, articulate how these actors exercise their agency in opposition to the socialization and inculcation of accepted norms. As has been shown above, Merton addressed this limitation through his concept of deviance, and so it can be seen that functionalism allows for agency, albeit negatively perceived. It cannot, however, explain why individuals choose to accept or reject the accepted norms, why and in what circumstances they choose to exercise their agency, and this does remain a considerable limitation of the theory.

5. Further criticisms have been leveled at functionalism by proponents of other social theories, particularly conflict theorists, Marxists, feminists and postmodernists. Conflict theorists criticized functionalism’s concept of system as giving far too much weight to integration and consensus, and neglecting independence and conflict (Holmwood, 2005). Lockwood (in Holmwood, 2005), in line with conflict theory, suggested that Parsons’ theory missed the concept of system contradiction. He did not account for those parts of the system that might have tendencies to mal-integration. According to Lockwood, it was these tendencies that come to the surface as opposition and conflict among actors. However, Parsons thought that the issues of conflict and cooperation were very much intertwined and sought to account for both in his model (Holmwood, 2005). In this, however, he was limited by his analysis of an ‘ideal type’ of society which was characterized by consensus. Merton, through his critique of functional unity, introduced into functionalism an explicit analysis of tension and conflict.

Jeffrey Alexander (1985) sees functionalism such as Parsons’s, as a broad school rather than a specific method or system, which is capable of taking equilibrium (stability) as a reference-point rather than assumption and treats structural differentiation as a major form of social change. "The name 'functionalism' implies a difference of method or interpretation that does not exist" (Davis 1967). This removes the determinism mentioned above. Cohen argues that rather than needs, a society has dispositional facts: features of the social environment that support the existence of particular social institutions but do not cause them (ibid).

positive functions, structural functionalism should be concerned with dysfunctions and even nonfunctions. Merton also discusses the application of his paradigm to the issue of the relationship of social structure and culture in the study of anomie and deviance.

We wrapped up our discussion by raising and discussing the numerous criticisms of structural functionalism that have succeeded in damaging its credibility and popularity. We discuss the criticisms that structural functionalism is ahistorical, unable to deal with social conflict and change, hence, highly conservative, preoccupied with societal constraints on actors, accepting of elite legitimacy, teleological, and tautological.

CHAPTER THREE

CONFLICT THEORY

Introduction

Conflict theory can be seen as a development that took place, at least in part, in reaction to structural functionalism and as a result of many of the criticisms discussed earlier. However, it should also be noted that conflict theory has various other roots, such as Marxian theory and Simmel's work on social conflict. In the 1950s and 1960s, conflict theory provided an alternative to structural functionalism, but it was soon superseded by a variety of neo-Marxian theories. Indeed, one of the major contributions of conflict theory was the way it laid the groundwork for theories more faithful to Marx's work. These theories came to attract a wide audience in sociology. The basic problem with conflict theory is that it never succeeded in divorcing itself from its structural-functional roots. It was more a kind of structural functionalism turned on its head than a truly critical theory of society.

Conflict theories are perspectives in social science which emphasize the social, political or material inequality of a social group, which critique the broad socio-political system, or which, otherwise, detract from structural functionalism and ideological conservatism. Conflict theories draw attention to power differentials, such as class conflict, and generally contrast traditional or historically dominant ideologies. Conflict theory is most commonly associated with Marxism, but as an alleged reaction to functionalism and the positivist method, it may also be associated with critical theory, feminist theory, queer theory, postmodern theory, poststructural theory, postcolonial theory, and a variety of other perspectives.

In this chapter, we will revise the major assumptions and contributions of conflict theories or an alternative theoretical and methodological framework to structural functionalism. This would be followed by an appraisal of the major criticisms leveled against conflict theories which, on the one hand, led to the proliferation of various types of critical theories, and, on the other hand, undermined the legitimacy of the theoretical framework in mainstream sociology.

3.1 Conflict Theorists

Conflict theory was elaborated in the United Kingdom by Max Gluckman (1911-1975) and John Rex (1925-...), in the United States by Lewis A. Coser (1913-2003) and Randall Collins (1941-...), and in Germany by Ralf Dahrendorf (1929-2009). All of them were influenced by Ludwig Gumpłowicz (1838-1909), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), Georg Simmel (1858-1918), and by Karl Marx (1818-1883).

In this section, we will revise the significant contributions of Ralf Dahrendorf to the development of conflict theory. In doing so, we believe that you will get an idea about the major themes, assumptions, and contributions of conflict theory.

The Work of Ralf Dahrendorf (1929-2009)

Like functionalists, conflict theorists are oriented toward the study of social structures and institutions. In the main, this theory is little more than a series of contentions that are often the direct opposites of functionalist positions. This *antithesis* is best exemplified by the work of Ralf Dahrendorf in which the tenets of conflict and functional theory are juxtaposed. To the functionalists, for instance, society is static or, at best, in a state of moving equilibrium, but to Dahrendorf and the conflict theorists, every society at every point is subject to processes of change. Where functionalists emphasize the orderliness of society, conflict theorists see dissension and conflict at every point in the social system. Functionalists (or at least early functionalists) argue that every element in society contributes to stability; the exponents of conflict theory see many societal elements contributing to disintegration and change.

Moreover, functionalists tend to see society as basically held together informally by norms, values, and a common morality. Conversely, conflict theorists see whatever order there is in society as stemming from the coercion of some members by those at the top. Whereas functionalists focus on the cohesion created by shared societal values, conflict theorists emphasize the role of power in maintaining order in society.

Dahrendorf is the major exponent of the position that society has two faces (conflict and consensus) and that sociological theory, therefore, should be divided into two parts, conflict theory and consensus theory. For him, consensus theorists should examine value integration in society, and conflict theorists should examine conflicts of interest and the coercion that holds society together in the face of these stresses. Dahrendorf recognized that society could not exist without both conflict and consensus, which are prerequisites for each other.

Dahrendorf's work on conflict reveals two main concerns. In terms of theories of society, like most conflict theorists, he emphasizes the primacy of power or authority and as a result, the inevitability of conflict and social change. Besides, Dahrendorf was also concerned with the conditions and determinants of active or overt conflict. Let us briefly discuss this concept which is central to his theoretical framework.

Authority: Dahrendorf concentrated on larger social structures. Central to his thesis is the idea that various positions within society have different amounts of authority. He understood that authority does not reside in individuals but in positions. Dahrendorf was interested not only in the structure of these positions but also in the conflict among them. The structural origin of such conflicts, he argued, must be sought in the arrangement of social roles endowed with expectations of domination or subjugation. The first task of conflict analysis, to Dahrendorf, was to identify various authority roles within society. In addition to making the case for the study of large-scale structures like authority roles, Dahrendorf was opposed to those who focus on the individual level.

Hence, the authority attached to positions is the key element in Dahrendorf's analysis. Firstly, authority always implies both super-ordination and subordination. Those who occupy positions of authority are expected to control subordinates; that is, they dominate because of the expectations of those who surround them, not because of their psychological characteristics. Like authority, these expectations are attached to positions, not people. Secondly, authority is not a generalized social phenomenon; those who are subject to control, as well as permissible spheres of control, are specified by society. Finally, because authority is legitimate, sanctions can be brought to bear against those who do not comply.

Authority is not a constant as far as Dahrendorf was concerned, because authority resides in positions and not persons. Thus, a person of authority in one setting does not necessarily hold a position of authority in another setting. Similarly, a person in a subordinate position in one group may be in a super-ordinate position in another. This follows from Dahrendorf's argument that society is composed of a number of units that he called *imperatively coordinated associations*. These may be seen as associations of people controlled by a hierarchy of authority positions. Since society contains many such associations, an individual can occupy a position of authority in one and a subordinate position in another.

Dahrendorf commented that authority within each association is dichotomous; thus, two, and only two, conflict groups can be formed within any association. Those in positions of authority and those in positions of subordination hold certain interests that are "contradictory in substance and direction".

Groups, Conflict, and Change: Next, Dahrendorf distinguished three broad types of groups. The first is the *quasi group*, or "aggregates of incumbents of positions with identical role interests". These are recruiting grounds for the second type of group—the interest group. Dahrendorf described the two groups as follows:

Common modes of behavior are characteristic of *interest groups* recruited from larger quasi-groups. Interest groups are groups in the strict sense of the sociological term; and they are the real agents of group conflict. They have a structure, a form of organization, a program or goal, and a personnel of members.

He viewed that out of all the many interest groups emerge, the third type, *conflict groups*, or those that actually engage in group conflict.

Dahrendorf felt that the concepts latent and manifest interests, of quasi-groups, interest groups, and conflict groups, were basic to an explanation of social conflict. Under *ideal* conditions no other variables would be needed. However, because conditions are never ideal, many different factors do intervene in the process. Dahrendorf mentioned technical conditions such as adequate personnel, political conditions such as the overall political climate, and social conditions such as the existence of communication links. The way people are recruited into the quasi group was another social condition important to Dahrendorf. He felt that if the recruitment is random and determined by chance, then an interest group, and ultimately a conflict group, is unlikely to emerge. However, when recruitment to quasi group is structurally determined, these groups provide fertile recruiting grounds for interest groups and, in some cases, conflict groups. Let us now have a thorough discussion of Dahrendorf's work.

Power-Authority, Conflict and Social Explanation

Class Division as Power Division

At a general level of social explanation, Dahrendorf argued that the distribution of power and authority is the most crucial determinant of social structure. Those groups with power and authority will promote their own interests, and those without power and authority will also try to do the same. Thus, he argues that conflict based on power and authority is an inherent tendency in society. Dahrendorf specifically asks how power conflict should be conceptualized in modern more complex societies. For this purpose, he returned back and reexamined the work of major classical figures who wrote on conflict including Marx and Weber.

Dahrendorf argued that Marx's analysis of capitalist society in the 19th century was valuable in understanding conflict in society. But, Marx's concepts and theories have to be modified if they are going to be useful in present situations. The central concept in Marx's theory is property and ownership of the means of production which is viewed as the basis of class, power, and conflict. Dahrendorf, however, argues that there have been significant changes in the social structure of modern society and these changes have produced almost a new type of society which is different from the one Marx analyzed.

In view of these changes, Dahrendorf noted, the basic weakness of Marx's approach is relating or directly tying power with property; that is, the means of production. Dahrendorf wants to redefine the concept of class itself because focusing on property, as Marx did, does not fully explain power and conflict in modern societies. For example, if we divide classes on the basis of property ownership, then most white-collar workers would be members of the working class because they do not own the means of production. Even top level managers can be considered as workers because they do not own the companies but work as salaried employees like other workers. And also in the case of socialist societies of Eastern Europe, Dahrendorf argues that these societies themselves were stratified internally. In addition, there

were several outbreaks of conflict in these societies, like the solidarity movement of 1980 in Poland. The point here is that it is difficult even to think about conflicts in Marxist property-division terms in former socialist countries, there was no private ownership of property and, hence, by definition no classes in Marxist terms.

Coming to Dahrendorf's central point, he attempts to solve problems of stratification as well as the bases of power in both modern capitalist and Eastern socialist societies of the period simply by redefining the concept of the notion of class or social division which generates conflict. Dahrendorf did this as follows arguing that:

“Wherever there is any social organization (which he calls imperatively coordinated associations), there is always a division between those who give order and those who take order. Giving order is empowering pleasure and it is also the major means to acquire wealth itself. On the other hand, taking order is a kind of disempowerment, and the lack of power and authority means that one will be less better off on the other dimension such as wealth, access to materials”.

Here then, Dahrendorf took the decisive but controversial step outside of the Marxist central conception and redefined class conflict to be based on power and authority, not on property as such.

Marx is not totally rejected; but, he is subsumed into a broader theory of conflict in modern complex societies. It is important to note that in Marx's time, property was in fact the most visible form of power. However, due to several changes, the scenario has changed such as the rise of bureaucratic corporations in which ownership and management and control of industry is separated as well as the massive growth of government which required a change in Marxist thought if it were to be a useful theoretical model.

Subordinates who take orders from them, however, they cannot overtly be in conflict with both sides at the same time. So, Dahrendorf argues that open conflict always boils down to two-sided. Once conflict breaks out between two parties, the other parties must either be neutral or join one or the other group. So, overt conflicts have a structural necessity to be two-sided and this is confirmed by many cases.

3.2 Basic Conflicts

Conflict theory, therefore, is a theory or collection of theories which places emphasis on conflict in human society (Jary and Jary, 2000). The discourse of conflict theory or perspectives is on the emergence of conflict and what causes conflict within a particular human society. Or we can say that conflict theory deals with the incompatible aspects of human society. Conflict theory emerged out of the sociology of conflict, crisis and social change. Consensus theory, on the other hand, is a sociological perspective or collection of theories, in which social order and stability or social regulation forms the base of emphasis. In other words, consensus theory is concerned with the maintenance or continuation of social order in society, in relation to accepted norms, values, rules and regulations as widely accepted or collectively held by the society or within a particular society itself. It emerged out of the sociology of social order and social stability or social regulation.

Put these into perspective: the consensus and conflict sociological theories are reflected in the works of certain dominant social theorists such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber; and other prominent social theorists such as Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton, Louis Althusser and Ralph Dahrendorf and Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer.

Let us now return to a discussion about the major social institution, education, which has been criticized repeatedly by most conflict theorists as it was assumed to perpetuate or reproduce the existing class divisions in a class society.

3.3 Assumptions of Conflict Theory

The following are four primary assumptions of modern conflict theory:

1. **Competition:** Competition over scarce resources (money, leisure, sexual partners, and so on) is at the heart of all social relationships. Competition, rather than consensus, is characteristic of human relationships in all societies to which this theory is applicable. Marxian materialists assert that there is no competitive human nature; rather, humans are influenced by their surroundings resulting in a competitive propensity.
2. **Structural Inequality:** Inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained.
3. **Revolution:** Change occurs as a result of conflict between competing social classes rather than through adaptation. Change is often abrupt and revolutionary rather than evolutionary.
4. **War:** Even war is a unifier of the societies involved, as well as possibly ending whole societies. In modern society, a source of conflict is power. Politicians are competing to enter into a system. They act in their self interest, not for the welfare of people.

3.5 The Major Criticisms of Conflict Theory

Conflict theory has been criticized on a variety of grounds. For example, it has been attacked for ignoring order and stability, whereas structural functionalism has been criticized for ignoring conflict and change. Conflict theory has also been criticized for being ideologically radical, whereas functionalism was criticized for its conservative ideology. Nonetheless, in comparison to structural functionalism, conflict theory is rather underdeveloped. It is not as sophisticated as functionalism, perhaps because it is a more derivative theory.

Dahrendorf's conflict theory has been subject to a number of critical analyses, including some critical reflections by him. First, Dahrendorf's model is not so clear a reflection of Marxian ideas as he claimed. In fact, it constitutes an inadequate translation of Marxian theory into sociology. Second, conflict theory has more in common with structural functionalism than with Marxian theory. Dahrendorf's emphasis on such things as systems (imperatively coordinated associations), positions, and roles links him directly to structural functionalism. As a result, his theory suffers from many of the same inadequacies as structural functionalism. Further, conflict theory seems to suffer from many of the same

conceptual and logical problems (for example, vague concepts and tautologies) as structural functionalism. Finally, like structural functionalism, conflict theory is almost wholly macroscopic and as a result has little to offer to our understanding of individual thought and action.

Varieties of Neo-Marxian Theories

3.6. Critical Theory: The Frankfurt School

Critical theory is the product of a group of German neo-Marxists who were dissatisfied with the state of Marxian theory, particularly its tendency toward economic determinism. But, what they refer to the term has been variously contested.

Two Primary Definitions

There are two meanings of critical theory which derive from two different intellectual traditions associated with the meaning of criticism and critique. Both derive ultimately from the Greek word *kritikos* meaning judgment or discernment, and in their present forms go back to the 18th century. While they can be considered completely independent intellectual pursuits, increasingly scholars are interested in the areas of critique where the two overlap.

To use an epistemological distinction introduced by the German sociologist Jürgen Habermas in *Erkenntnis und Interesse* [1968] (*Knowledge and Human Interests*), critical theory in literary studies is ultimately a form of hermeneutics, i.e. knowledge gained via interpretation to understand the meaning of human texts and symbolic expressions. Critical social theory is, in contrast, a form of self-reflective knowledge involving both understanding and theoretical explanation to reduce entrapment in systems of domination or dependence, obeying the emancipatory interest in expanding the scope of autonomy and reducing the scope of domination.

From this perspective, much literary critical theory, since it is focused on interpretation and explanation rather than on social transformation, would be regarded as positivistic or traditional rather than critical theory in the Kantian or Marxian sense. Critical theory in literature and the humanities in general does not necessarily involve a normative dimension, whereas critical social theory does, either through criticizing society from some general theory of values, norms, or oughts, or through criticizing it in terms of its own espoused values.

Critical Social Theory

The initial meaning of the term *critical theory* was that defined by Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School of Sociology in his 1937 essay *Traditional and Critical Theory*. He stated that critical theory is a social theory oriented toward critiquing and changing society as a

whole, in contrast to traditional theory oriented only to understanding or explaining it. Horkheimer wanted to distinguish critical theory as a radical, emancipatory form of Marxian theory, critiquing both the model of science put forward by logical positivism and what he and his colleagues saw as the covert positivism and authoritarianism of orthodox Marxism and Communism.

Core concepts of critical theory, as identified by Horkheimer, are: (1) critical social theory should be directed at the totality of society in its historical specificity (i.e. how it came to be configured at a specific point in time), and (2) critical theory should improve understanding of society by integrating all the major social sciences, including geography, economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology, and psychology. Although this conception of critical theory originated with the Frankfurt School, it also prevails among other recent social scientists, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Louis Althusser and arguably Michel Foucault, as well as certain feminist theorists and social scientists.

This version of critical theory derives from Kant's (18th century) and Marx's (19th century) use of the term critique, as in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and Marx's concept that his work *Das Kapital (Capital)* forms a "critique of political economy". For Kant's transcendental idealism, "critique" means examining and establishing the limits of the validity of a faculty, type, or body of knowledge, especially through accounting for the limitations imposed by the fundamental, irreducible concepts in use in that knowledge system. Early on, Kant's notion associated critique with the disestablishment of false, unprovable, or dogmatic philosophical, social, and political beliefs, because Kant's critique of reason involved the critique of dogmatic theological and metaphysical ideas and was intertwined with the enhancement of ethical autonomy and the Enlightenment critique of superstition and irrational authority. Marx explicitly developed this notion into the critique of ideology and linked it with the practice of social revolution, as in the famous 11th of his "Theses on Feuerbach," "Philosophers have only interpreted the world in certain ways; the point is to change it".

In the 1960s, Jürgen Habermas raised the epistemological discussion to a new level in his *Knowledge and Human Interests*, by identifying critical knowledge as based on principles that differentiated it either from the natural sciences or the humanities, through its orientation to self-reflection and emancipation.

The term *critical theory*, in the sociological or philosophical and non-literary sense, now loosely groups all sorts of work, including that of the Frankfurt School, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, disability studies and feminist theory, that has in common the critique of domination, an emancipatory interest, and the fusion of social/cultural analysis, explanation, and interpretation with social/cultural critique.

4.4 The Major Critiques of Critical Theory

Critical theory is composed largely of criticisms of various aspects of social and intellectual life, but its ultimate goal is to reveal more accurately the nature of society.

1. Critique of Marxian Theory:

Critical theory takes as its starting point a critique of Marxian theories. The critical theorists are most disturbed by the economic determinists; the mechanistic, or mechanical, Marxists. Some (for example, Habermas) criticize the determinism implicit in parts of Marx's original work, but most focus their criticisms on the neo-Marxists, primarily because they had interpreted Marx's work too mechanistically. The critical theorists do not say that economic determinists were wrong in focusing on the economic realm but that they should have been concerned with other aspects of social life as well. The critical school seeks to rectify this imbalance by focusing its attention on the cultural realm. In addition to attacking other Marxian theories, the critical school critiqued societies, like the former Soviet Union, built ostensibly on Marxian theory.

2. Critique of Positivism:

Critical theorists also focus on the philosophical understanding of scientific inquiry especially positivism. The criticism of positivism is related, at least in part, to the criticism of economic determinism, because some of those who were determinists accepted part or all of the positivistic theory of knowledge. Positivism is depicted as accepting the idea that a single scientific method is applicable to all fields of study. It takes the physical sciences as the standard of certainty and exactness for all disciplines. Positivists believe that knowledge is inherently neutral. They feel that they can keep human values out of their work. This belief, in turn, leads to the view that science is not in the position of advocating any specific form of social action.

Positivism is opposed by the critical school on various grounds. For one thing, positivism tends to reify the social world and see it as a natural process. The critical theorists prefer to focus on human activity as well as on the ways in which such activity affects larger social structures. In short, as to critical theorists, positivism loses sight of the actors, reducing them to passive entities determined by "natural forces". Given their belief in the distinctiveness of the actor, critical theorists would not accept the idea that the general laws of science can be applied without question to human action. Positivism is assailed for being content to judge the adequacy of means toward given ends and for not making similar judgment about ends. This critique leads to the view that positivism is inherently conservative, incapable of challenging the existing system. Positivism leads the actor and the social scientist to passivity. Few Marxists of any type would support a perspective that does not relate theory and practice. Despite these criticisms of positivism, some Marxists espouse positivism, and Marx himself was often guilty of being positivistic.

3. Critique of Sociology:

Sociology is attacked for its 'scientism', that is, for making the scientific method an end in itself. In addition, sociology is accused of accepting the status quo. The critical school maintains that sociology does not seriously criticize society, nor does it seek to transcend the

contemporary social structure. Sociology, the critical school comments, has surrendered its obligation to help people oppressed by contemporary society.

Members of this school are critical of sociologists' focus on society as a whole rather than on individuals in society. Moreover, sociologists are accused of ignoring the interaction of the individual and society. Although most sociological perspectives are *not* guilty of ignoring this interaction, this view is a cornerstone of the critical school's attacks on sociologists. Because they ignore the individual, sociologists are seen as being unable to say anything meaningful about political changes that could lead to a just and humane society. Sociology, critical theorists claim, becomes an integral part of the existing society instead of being a means of critique and a ferment of renewal.

PART II: MICRO-SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

This part deals with theories that attempt to explain, understand, or interpret micro-level social phenomena rather than the focus on large-scale social structures as is the concern of the preceding theories presented earlier.

Consequently, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology are the micro-level theories that are discussed in this part separately in chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Introduction

Symbolic Interactionism is a major sociological perspective that places emphasis on micro-scale social interaction, which is particularly important in subfields such as urban sociology and social psychology. Symbolic interactionism is derived from American pragmatism, especially the work of George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley. Herbert Blumer, a student and interpreter of Mead, coined the term and put forward an influential summary of the perspective: people act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them; and, these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interaction and interpretation.

Sociologists working in this tradition have researched a wide range of topics using a variety of research methods. However, the majority of interactionist research uses qualitative research methods, like participant observation, to study aspects of (1) social interaction and/or (2) individuals' selves. Sociological areas that have been particularly influenced by symbolic interactionism include the sociology of emotions, deviance/criminology, collective behavior/social movements, and the sociology of sex. Interactionist concepts that have gained widespread usage include definition of the situation, emotion work, impression management, looking glass self, and total institution.

1.1 The Major Historical Roots

We begin our discussion of symbolic interactionism with Mead. The two most significant intellectual roots of Mead's work in particular, and of symbolic interactionism in general, are the philosophy of pragmatism and psychological behaviorism.

1.1.1 Pragmatism and Symbolic Interaction

Philosophers whose inspiration is more metaphysical and ontological, (e.g. Heidegger), emphasize the uncovering of Being from the perspective of the experiencing human being, and how the world is revealed to this experiencing entity within a realm of things. Pragmatic philosophers like Mead focus on the development of the self and the objectivity of the world within the social realm: that "the individual mind can exist only in relation to other minds with shared meanings" (Mead, 1982).

The two most important roots of Mead's work, and of symbolic interactionism in general are the philosophy of pragmatism, and psychological behaviorism. Pragmatism is a wide ranging philosophical position from which several aspects of Mead's influences can be identified.

There are four main tenets of pragmatism. First, to pragmatists, true reality does not exist "out there" in the real world, it "is actively created as we act in and toward the world. Second, people remember and base their knowledge of the world on what has been useful to them and are likely to alter what no longer "works." Third, people define the social and physical "objects" they encounter in the world according to their use for them. Fourth, if we want to understand actors, we must base that understanding on what people actually do. Three of these ideas are critical to symbolic interactionism: (1) the focus on the interaction between the actor and the world; (2) a view of both the actor and the world as dynamic processes and not static structures; and (3) the actor's ability to interpret the social world. Thus, to Mead and symbolic interactionists, consciousness is not separated from action and interaction, but is an integral part of both.

Mead's theories in part, based on pragmatism and behaviorism, were transmitted to many graduate students at the University of Chicago who then went on to establish symbolic interactionism.

1.1.2 Social Philosophy (Behaviorism)

Mead was a very important figure in 20th century social philosophy. One of his most influential ideas was the emergence of mind and self from the communication process between organisms, discussed in *Mind, Self and Society*, also known as social behaviorism. This concept of the how mind and self emerge from the social process of communication by signs founded the symbolic interactionist school of sociology. Rooted intellectually in Hegelian dialectics and process philosophy, Mead, like Dewey, developed a more materialist process philosophy that was based upon human action and specifically communicative action. Human activity is, in a pragmatic sense, the criterion of truth, and through human

activity meaning is made. Joint activity, including communicative activity, is the means through which our sense of self is constituted. The essence of Mead's social behaviorism is that mind is not a substance located in some transcendent realm, nor is it merely a series of events that takes place within the human physiological structure. This approach opposed traditional view of the mind as separate from the body. The emergence of mind is contingent upon interaction between the human organism and its social environment; it is through participation in the social act of communication that the individual realizes their potential for significantly symbolic behavior, that is, thought. Mind, in Mead's terms, is the individualized focus of the communicational process. It is linguistic behavior on the part of the individual. There is, then, no "mind or thought without language;" and language (the content of mind) "is only a development and product of social interaction". Thus, mind is not reducible to the neurophysiology of the organic individual, but is emergent in "the dynamic, ongoing social process" that constitutes human experience.

For Mead, mind arises out of the social act of communication. Mead's concept of the social act is relevant, not only to his theory of mind, but to all facets of his social philosophy. His theory of "mind, self, and society" is, in effect, a philosophy of the act from the standpoint of a social process involving the interaction of many individuals, just as his theory of knowledge and value is a philosophy of the act from the standpoint of the experiencing individual in interaction with an environment. Action is very important to his social theory and, according to Mead, actions also occur within a communicative process. The initial phase of an act constitutes a gesture. A gesture is a preparatory movement that enables other individuals to become aware of the intentions of the given organism. The rudimentary situation is a conversation of gestures, in which a gesture on the part of the first individual evokes a preparatory movement on the part of the second, and the gesture of the second organism in turn calls out a response in the first person. On this level no communication occurs. Neither organism is aware of the effect of its own gestures upon the other; the gestures are nonsignificant. For communication to take place, each organism must have knowledge of how the other individual will respond to his own ongoing act. Here the gestures are significant symbols. A significant symbol is a kind of gesture that only humans can make. Gestures become significant symbols when they arouse in the individual who is making them the same kind of response they are supposed to elicit from those to whom the gestures are addressed. Only when we have significant symbols can we truly have communication. Mead grounded human perception in an "action-nexus" (Joas 1985: 148). We perceive the world in terms of the "means of living" (Mead 1982: 120). To perceive food, is to perceive eating. To perceive a house, is to perceive shelter. That is to say, perception is in terms of action. Mead's theory of perception is similar to that of J. J. Gibson.

Mead the social psychologist argued the antipositivistic view that the individual is a product of society, or more specifically, social interaction. The *self* arises when the individual becomes an object to themselves. Mead argued that we are objects first to other people, and secondarily we become objects to ourselves by taking the perspective of other people. Language enables us to talk about ourselves in the same way as we talk about other people, and thus through language we become other to ourselves. In joint activity, which Mead called

'social acts', humans learn to see themselves from the standpoint of their co-actors. It is through realizing ones role in relation to others that selfhood arises.

However, for Mead, unlike John Dewey and J. J. Gibson, the key is not simply human action, but rather social action. In humans the "manipulatory phase of the act" is socially mediated; that is to say, in acting towards objects humans simultaneously take the perspectives of others towards that object. This is what Mead means by "the social act" as opposed to simply "the act" (the latter being a Deweyan concept). Non-human animals also manipulate objects, but that is a non-social manipulation, they do not take the perspective of other organisms toward the object. Humans on the other hand, take the perspective of other actors towards objects, and this is what enables complex human society and subtle social coordination. In the social act of economic exchange, for example, both buyer and seller must take each other's perspectives towards the object being exchanged. The seller must recognize the value for the buyer, while the buyer must recognize the desirability of money for the seller. Only with this mutual perspective taking can the economic exchange occur (Mead was influenced on this point by Adam Smith).

A final piece of Mead's social theory is the mind as the individual importation of the social process. As previously discussed, Mead presented the self and the mind in terms of a social process. As gestures are taken in by the individual organism the individual organism also takes in the collective attitudes others, in the form of gestures, and reacts accordingly with other organized attitudes. This process is characterized by Mead as the "I" and the "Me." The "Me" is the social self and the "I" is the response to the "Me." In other words, the "I" is the response of an individual to the attitudes of others, while the "me" is the organized set of attitudes of others which an individual assumes. Mead develops William James' distinction between the "I" and the "me." The "me" is the accumulated understanding of "the generalized other" i.e. how one thinks one's group perceives oneself etc. The "I" is the individual's impulses. The "I" is self as subject; the "me" is self as object. The "I" is the knower, the "me" is the known. The mind, or stream of thought, is the self-reflective movements of the interaction between the "I" and the "me". These dynamics go beyond selfhood in a narrow sense, and form the basis of a theory of human cognition. For Mead the thinking process is the internalized dialogue between the "I" and the "me". Mead rooted the self's "perception and meaning" deeply and sociologically in "a common praxis of subjects" (Joas 1985: 166) found specifically in social encounters. Understood as a combination of the 'I' and the 'me', Mead's self proves to be noticeably entwined within a sociological existence: For Mead, existence in community comes before individual consciousness. First one must participate in the different social positions within society and only subsequently can one use that experience to take the perspective of others and thus become self-conscious.

1.1.3 Philosophy of Science

Mead is a major American philosopher by virtue of being, along with John Dewey, Charles Peirce and William James, one of the founders of pragmatism. He also made significant contributions to the philosophies of nature, science, and history, to philosophical anthropology, and to process philosophy. Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead considered

Mead a thinker of the first rank. He is a classic example of a social theorist whose work does not fit easily within conventional disciplinary boundaries.

As far as his work on the philosophy of science, Mead sought to find the psychological origin of science in the efforts of individuals to attain power over their environment. The notion of a physical object arises out of manipulatory experience. There is a social relation to inanimate objects, for the organism takes the role of things that it manipulates directly, or that it manipulates indirectly in perception. For example, in taking (introjecting or imitating) the resistant role of a solid object, an individual obtains cognition of what is "inside" nonliving things. Historically, the concept of the physical object arose from an animistic conception of the universe.

Contact experience includes experiences of position, balance, and support, and these are used by the organism when it creates its conceptions of the physical world. Our scientific concepts of space, time, and mass are abstracted from manipulatory experience. Such concepts as that of the electron are also derived from manipulation. In developing a science we construct hypothetical objects in order to assist ourselves in controlling nature. The conception of the present as a distinct unit of experience, rather than as a process of becoming and disappearing, is a scientific fiction devised to facilitate exact measurement. In the scientific worldview immediate experience is replaced by theoretical constructs. The ultimate in experience, however, is the manipulation and contact at the completion of an act.

1.2 Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism: Basic premises and approach

Herbert Blumer (1969), who coined the term "symbolic interactionism," set out three basic premises of the perspective:

1. "Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things";
2. "The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society"; and,
3. "These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters."

Blumer, following Mead, claimed that people interact with each other by interpret[ing] or 'defin[ing]' each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions. Individuals' 'response' is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols and signification, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another's actions (Blumer, 1962). Blumer contrasted this process, which he called "symbolic interaction," with behaviorist explanations of human behavior, which do not allow for interpretation between stimulus and response.

Symbolic interactionist researchers investigate how people create meaning through social interaction, how they present and construct the self (or "identity"), and how they define

situations of co-presence with others. One of the perspective's central ideas is that people act as they do because of how they define situations.

Alongside Herbert Blumer, Erving Goffman, although he claimed not to have been a symbolic interactionist, is recognized as one of the major contributors to the perspective. Let us briefly discern his contributions in the section that follows.

1.3 Erving Goffman as a Sociologist

Goffman was one of the greatest North American sociologists of his generation. Along with many other sociologists of his cohort, he was heavily influenced by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer in developing his theoretical framework. Goffman studied at the University of Chicago with Everett Hughes, Edward Shils, and W. Lloyd Warner. He would go on to pioneer the study of face-to-face interaction, or micro-sociology, elaborate the "dramaturgical approach" to human interaction, and develop numerous concepts that would have a massive influence.

Goffman's greatest contribution to social theory is his formulation of symbolic interaction as dramaturgical perspective in his 1956 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, which begins with an epigraph by George Santayana about masks. Largely working within the tradition of symbolic interactionism, he greatly elaborated on its central concepts and application. For Goffman, society is not homogeneous. We must act differently in different settings. The context we have to judge is not society at large, but the specific context. Goffman suggests that life is a sort of theater, but we also need a parking lot and a cloak room: there is a wider context lying beyond the face-to-face symbolic interaction. "Throughout *Presentation of Self*, Goffman seems to perceive the individual as nothing more than a cog responsible for the maintenance of the social world by playing his or her part. In fact, he refers to the self as a 'peg' upon which 'something of a collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time.'"

He also wrote *Frame analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*, *Forms of Talk* and many other books and essays. Many of his works form the basis for the sociological and media studies concept of framing.

1.3.1 Dramaturgy: The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1956) was Goffman's first and most famous work. It was also the first book to treat face-to-face interaction as a subject of study in the sociological aspect. Goffman treated this book as a kind of report in which he frames out the theatrical performance that applies to face-to-face interactions. He believed that when an individual comes in contact with other people, that individual will attempt to control or guide the impression that others might make of him by changing or fixing his or her setting, appearance and manner. At the same time, the person that the individual is interacting with is trying, in his own ways, to form and obtain information about the individual. Goffman also

believed that all participants in social interactions are engaged in certain practices to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others.

This led to Goffman's dramaturgical analysis. Goffman saw a connection between the kinds of acts that people put on in their daily life and theatrical performances. In social interaction, like in theatrical performance, there is a front region where the "actors" (individuals) are on stage in front of the audiences. This is where positive aspect of the idea of self and desired impressions are highlighted. There is a back region or stage which can also be considered as a hidden or private place where the individual can be themselves and get rid of their role or identity in society.

1.3.2 Interaction Ritual

This book is a collection of six of Goffman's essays; the first four essays was published around the 1950s, the fifth is published in 1964, and the last essay was to finish the collection. His six essays are "On Face-work", "Embarrassment and Social Organization", "The Nature of Defense and Demeanor", "Alienation from Interaction", "Mental Symptoms and Public Order" and "Where the Action Is". Goffman's first essay, "On Face-work, focused on the concept of face, which is the positive image of self that individuals have when interacting with others. Goffman believed that face "as a sociological construct of interaction, is neither inherent in nor permanent aspect of the person". Once an individual gives out a positive self image of themselves to others then they feel a need to keep or live up to that set image. When individuals are inconsistent with how they project themselves in society, they risk embarrassment or being discredited, therefore the individual are consistently guarded, making sure that they do not show themselves in an unfavorable way to others.

1.3.3 Frame Analysis

This book was Goffman's way of trying to explain how conceptual frames structure the individual's perception of the society; therefore, this book is about organization of experiences rather than organization of society. Frames organize the experiences and guides action for the individual and/ or for everyone. Frame analysis, then, is the study of organization of social experiences. One example that Goffman used to help people better understand the concept is associating the frame with the concept of a picture frame. He used the picture frame concept to illustrate how people use the frame (which represents structure) to hold together their picture (which represents the context) of what they are experiencing in their life. The most basic frames are called primary frameworks. These frameworks take an experience or an aspect of a scene of an individual that would originally be meaningless and make it to become meaningful. One type of primary framework is natural frameworks, which identifies situations that happened in the natural world, and is completely physical with no human influences. The other type of framework is social framework, which explains events and connects it to humans. An example of natural framework would be the weather and an example of social framework would be people the meteorologist who reports people with the weather forecast. Goffman concentrates more on the frameworks and tries to "construct a

general statement regarding the structure, or form, of experiences individuals have at any moment of their social life”

1.4 Labeling Theory

Now, let us turn to a discussion of the other variety of symbolic interactionism called *Labeling Theory*.

Originating in sociology and criminology, labeling theory (also known as social reaction theory) was developed by sociologist Howard Becker. It focuses on the linguistic tendency of majorities to negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant from norms. The theory is concerned with how the self-identity and behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them, and is associated with the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy and stereotyping. The theory was prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, and some modified versions of the theory have developed. Unwanted descriptors or categorizations (including terms related to deviance, disability or a diagnosis of mental illness) may be rejected on the basis that they are merely "labels", often with attempts to adopt a more constructive language in its place.

1.4.1 Theoretical Foundations of Labeling Theory

As a contributor to American Pragmatism and later a member of the Chicago School, George Herbert Mead posited that the self is socially constructed and reconstructed through the interactions which each person has with the community. Each individual is aware of how they are judged by others because he or she has attempted many different roles and functions in social interactions and has been able to gauge the reactions of those present. This theoretically builds a subjective conception of the self, but as others intrude into the reality of that individual's life, this represents objective data which may require a re-evaluation of that conception depending on the authoritativeness of the others' judgment. Family and friends may judge differently from random strangers. More socially representative individuals such as police officers or judges may be able to make better respected judgments. For instance, if deviance is a failure to conform to the rules observed by most of the group, the reaction of the group is to label the person as having offended against their social or moral norms of behavior. This is the power of the group: to designate breaches of their rules as deviant and to treat the person differently depending on the seriousness of the breach. The more differential the treatment, the more the individual's self-image is affected.

Whether a breach of a given rule will be stigmatized will depend on the significance of the moral or other tenet it represents. For example, adultery may be considered a breach of an informal rule or it may be criminalized depending on the status of marriage, morality, and religion within the community. In most Western countries, adultery is not a crime. Attaching the label "adulterer" may have some unfortunate consequences but they are not generally severe. But in some Islamic countries, it is a crime and proof of extramarital activity may lead to severe consequences for all concerned.

There are also problems with stereotypes. The breach of a rule may be treated differently depending on personal factors such as the age, gender, race, etc. of the rule-breaker, or there may be relevant structural factors such as the offender's social class, the neighborhood where the offense took place, and the time of day or night. Let us try to illustrate the elements of labeling theory by taking certain social facts and elucidate how it has attempted to explain social behavior.

1.4.2 Modified Labeling Theory

Bruce Link and colleagues have conducted several studies which point to the influence that labeling can have on mental patients. Through these studies, which took place in 1987, 1989, and 1997, Link advanced a "modified labeling theory" indicating that expectations of labeling can have a large negative effect, that these expectations often cause patients to withdraw from society, and that those labeled as having a mental disorder are constantly being rejected from society in seemingly minor ways but that, when taken as a whole, all of these small slights can drastically alter their self concepts. They come to both anticipate and perceive negative societal reactions to them, and this potentially damages their quality of life.

Modified labeling theory has been described as a "sophisticated social-psychological model of 'why labels matter'". In 2000, results from a prospective two-year study of patients discharged from a mental hospital (in the context of deinstitutionalization) showed that stigma was a powerful and persistent force in their lives, and that experiences of social rejection were a persistent source of social stress. Efforts to cope with labels, such as not telling anyone, educating people about mental distress/disorder, withdrawing from stigmatizing situations, could result in further social isolation and reinforce negative self-concepts. Sometimes an identity as a low self-esteem minority in society would be accepted. The stigma was associated with diminished motivation and ability to "make it in mainstream society" and with "a state of social and psychological vulnerability to prolonged and recurrent problems". There was an up and down pattern in self-esteem, however. It was suggested that, rather than simply gradual erosion of self-worth and increasing self-deprecating tendencies, people were sometimes managing, but struggling, to maintain consistent feelings of self-worth. Ultimately, "a cadre of patients had developed an entrenched, negative view of themselves, and their experiences of rejection appear to be a key element in the construction of these self-related feelings" and "hostile neighborhoods may not only affect their self-concept but may also ultimately impact the patient's mental health status and how successful they are".

1.4.3 Types of Labeling

Hard and Soft Labeling: People who believe in hard labeling believe that mental illness does not exist. It is merely deviance from the norms of society that cause people to believe in mental illness. Thus, mental illnesses are socially constructed illnesses and psychotic disorders do not exist. On the other hand, people who believe in soft labeling believe that mental illnesses do, in fact, exist. Unlike the supporters of hard labeling, Soft labeling supporters believe that mental illnesses are not socially constructed.

1.5 Criticisms of Symbolic Interactionism

Having analyzed the ideas of symbolic interactionism, particularly the Chicago school of Mead, Blumer, and Goffman, we will now enumerate some of the major weaknesses of this perspective.

The first criticism is that the mainstream of symbolic interactionism has too readily given up on conventional scientific techniques. Eugene Weinstein and Judith Tanur expressed this point well: “Just because the contents of consciousness are qualitative, does not mean that their exterior expression cannot be coded, classified, even counted” (1976). Science and subjectivism are not mutually exclusive.

Second, many others have criticized the vagueness of essential Meadian concepts such as mind, self, I, and me. Because the concepts are imprecise, it is difficult to operationalize them; the result is that testable propositions cannot be generated.

The third major criticism of symbolic interactionism has been of its tendency to downplay or ignore large-scale social structures. This criticism has been expressed in various ways. Symbolic interactionism ignores the connectedness of outcomes to each other. It is the aggregated outcomes that form the linkages among episodes of interaction that are the concern of sociology. The concept of social structure is necessary to deal with the incredible density and complexity of relations through which episodes of interaction are interconnected. The other argument is that the micro focus of symbolic interactionism serves to minimize or deny the facts of social structure and the impact of the macro-organizational features of society on behavior.

Somewhat less predictable is the fourth criticism, that symbolic interactionism is not sufficiently microscopic, that it ignores the importance of such factors as the unconscious and emotions. Similarly symbolic interactionism has been criticized for ignoring such psychological factors as needs, motives, intentions, and aspirations. In their effort to deny that there are immutable forces impelling the actor to act, symbolic interactionists have focused instead on meaning, symbols, action, and interaction. They ignore psychological factors that might impel the actor, an action which parallels their neglect of the larger societal constraints on the actor. In both cases, symbolic interactionists are accused of making a *fetish* out of everyday life. This focus on everyday life, in turn, leads to a marked reemphasis on the immediate situation and an observable concern with the transient, episodic, and fleeting.

CHAPTER SIX

PHENOMENOLOGY

Phenomenology (philosophy): Introduction

Phenomenology (from Greek: *phainómenon* "that which appears"; and *lógos* "study") is a philosophical movement. It was founded in the early years of the 20th century by Edmund Husserl, expanded together with a circle of his followers at the universities of Göttingen and Munich in Germany, and spread across to France, the United States, and elsewhere, often in contexts far removed from Husserl's early work.

Phenomenology, in Husserl's conception, is primarily concerned with the systematic reflection on and analysis of the structures of consciousness, and the phenomena which appear in acts of consciousness. Such reflection was to take place from a highly modified "first person" viewpoint, studying phenomena not as they appear to "my" consciousness, but to any consciousness whatsoever. Husserl believed that phenomenology could, thus, provide a firm basis for all human knowledge, including scientific knowledge, and could establish philosophy as a "rigorous science".

Husserl's conception of phenomenology has been criticized and developed not only by himself, but also by his student Martin Heidegger, by existentialists, such as Max Scheler, Nicolai Hartmann, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and by other philosophers, such as Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, and Alfred Schütz.

6.1 The Idea of Phenomenology

In its most basic form, phenomenology attempts to create conditions for the objective study of topics usually regarded as subjective: consciousness and the content of conscious experiences such as judgments, perceptions, and emotions. Although phenomenology seeks to be scientific, it does not attempt to study consciousness from the perspective of clinical psychology or neurology. Instead, it seeks through systematic reflection to determine the essential properties and structures of consciousness and conscious experience.

Husserl derived many important concepts central to phenomenology from the works and lectures of his teachers, the philosophers and psychologists Franz Brentano and Carl Stumpf. An important element of phenomenology that Husserl borrowed from Brentano was intentionality (often described as "aboutness"), the notion that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. The object of consciousness is called the *intentional object*, and this object is constituted for consciousness in many different ways, through, for instance, perception, memory, retention and pretention, signification, etc. Throughout these different intentionalities, though they have different structures and different ways of being "about" the object, an object is still constituted as the same identical object; consciousness is directed at the same intentional object in direct perception as it is in the immediately following retention of this object and the eventual remembering of it.

Though many of the phenomenological methods involve various reductions, phenomenology is essentially anti-reductionistic; the reductions are mere tools to better understand and describe the workings of consciousness, not to reduce any phenomenon to these descriptions. In other words, when a reference is made to a thing's *essence* or *idea*, or when one details the constitution of an identical coherent thing by describing what one "really" sees as being only these sides and aspects, these surfaces, it does not mean that the thing is only and exclusively what is described here: The ultimate goal of these reductions is to understand *how* these different aspects are constituted into the actual thing as experienced by the person experiencing it. Phenomenology is a direct reaction to the psychologism and physicalism of Husserl's time.

Although previously employed by Hegel, it was Husserl's adoption of this term (circa 1900) that propelled it into becoming the designation of a philosophical school. As a philosophical perspective, phenomenology is its method, though the specific meaning of the term varies according to how it is conceived by a given philosopher. As envisioned by Husserl, phenomenology is a method of philosophical inquiry that rejects the rationalist bias that has dominated Western thought since Plato in favor of a method of reflective attentiveness that discloses the individual's "lived experience." Loosely rooted in an epistemological device, with Sceptic roots, called epoché, Husserl's method entails the suspension of judgment while relying on the intuitive grasp of knowledge, free of presuppositions and intellectualizing. Sometimes depicted as the "science of experience," the phenomenological method is rooted in intentionality, Husserl's theory of consciousness (developed from Brentano). Intentionality represents an alternative to the representational theory of consciousness which holds that reality cannot be grasped directly because it is available only through perceptions of reality which are representations of it in the mind. Husserl countered that consciousness is not "in" the mind but rather conscious of something other than itself (the intentional object), whether the object is a substance or a figment of imagination (i.e. the real processes associated with and underlying the figment). Hence the phenomenological method relies on the description of phenomena as they are given to consciousness, in their immediacy.

According to Maurice Natanson (1973), the radicality of the phenomenological method is both continuous and discontinuous with philosophy's general effort to subject experience to fundamental, critical scrutiny: to take nothing for granted and to show the warrant for what we claim to know. In practice, it entails an unusual combination of discipline and detachment to suspend, or bracket, theoretical explanations and second-hand information while determining one's "naive" experience of the matter. The phenomenological method serves to momentarily erase the world of speculation by returning the subject to his or her primordial experience of the matter, whether the object of inquiry is a feeling, an idea, or a perception. According to Husserl the suspension of belief in what we ordinarily take for granted or infer by conjecture diminishes the power of what we customarily embrace as objective reality. According to Safranski (1998, 72), "[Husserl and his followers'] great ambition was to disregard anything that had until then been thought or said about consciousness or the world [while] on the lookout for a new way of letting the things [they investigated] approach them, without covering them up with what they already knew."

Heidegger modified Husserl's conception of phenomenology because of (what he perceived as) his subjectivist tendencies. Whereas Husserl conceived humans as having been constituted by states of consciousness, Heidegger countered that consciousness is peripheral to the primacy of one's existence which cannot be reduced to one's consciousness of it. From this angle, one's state of mind is an "effect" rather than a determinant of existence, including those aspects of existence that one is not conscious of. By shifting the center of gravity from consciousness (psychology) to existence (ontology), Heidegger altered the subsequent direction of phenomenology, making it at once both personal and mysterious. One of the consequences of Heidegger's modification of Husserl's conception of phenomenology was its increased relevance to psychoanalysis. Whereas Husserl gave priority to a depiction of consciousness that was fundamentally alien to the psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious, Heidegger offered a way to conceptualize experience that could accommodate those aspects of one's existence that lie on the periphery of sentient awareness.

6.2 Special terminology

6.2.1 Intentionality

Intentionality refers to the notion that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. The word itself should not be confused with the "ordinary" use of the word intentional, but should rather be taken as playing on the etymological roots of the word. Originally, intention referred to a "stretching out" ("in tension," lat. *Intendere*), and in this context it refers to consciousness "*stretching out*" towards its object. Intentionality is often summed up as "aboutness."

Whether this *something* that consciousness is about is in direct perception or in fantasy is inconsequential to the concept of intentionality itself; whatever consciousness is directed at, *that* is what consciousness is consciousness of. This means that the object of consciousness doesn't *have* to be a *physical* object apprehended in perception: it can just as well be a fantasy or a memory. Consequently, these "structures" of consciousness, i.e., perception, memory, fantasy, etc., are called *intentionalities*.

The cardinal principle of phenomenology, the term intentionality originated with the Scholastics in the medieval period and was resurrected by Brentano who in turn influenced Husserl's conception of phenomenology, who refined the term and made it the cornerstone of his theory of consciousness. The meaning of the term is complex and depends entirely on how it is conceived by a given philosopher. The term should not be confused with "intention" or the psychoanalytic conception of unconscious "motive" or "gain."

6.2.2 Intuition

Intuition in phenomenology refers to those cases where the intentional object is directly present to the intentionality at play; if the intention is "filled" by the direct apprehension of the object, you have an intuited object. Having a cup of coffee in front of you, for instance, seeing it, feeling it, or even imagining it - these are all filled intentions, and the object is then

intuited. The same goes for the apprehension of mathematical formulae or a number. If you do not have the object as referred to directly, the object is not intuited, but still intended, but then *emptily*. Examples of empty intentions can be signitive intentions - intentions that only *imply* or *refer to* their objects.

6.2.3 Evidence

In everyday language, we use the word evidence to signify a special sort of relation between a state of affairs and a proposition: State A is evidence for the proposition "A is true." In phenomenology, however, the concept of evidence is meant to signify the "subjective achievement of truth." This is not an attempt to reduce the objective sort of evidence to subjective "opinion," but rather an attempt to describe the structure of having something present in intuition with the addition of having it present as *intelligible*: "Evidence is the successful presentation of an intelligible object, the successful presentation of something whose truth becomes manifest in the evidencing itself."

6.2.4 Noesis and Noema

In Husserl's phenomenology, this pair of terms, derived from the Greek *nous* (mind), designate respectively the real content and the ideal content of an intentional act (an act of consciousness). The Noesis is the part of the act which gives it a particular sense or character (as in judging or perceiving something, loving or hating it, accepting or rejecting it, and so on). This is real in the sense that it is actually part of what takes place in the consciousness (or psyche) of the subject of the act. The Noesis is always correlated with a Noema; for Husserl the full Noema is a complex ideal structure comprising at least a noematic sense and a noematic core. The correct interpretation of what Husserl meant by the Noema has long been controversial, but the noematic sense is generally understood as the ideal meaning of the act and the noematic core as the act's referent or object *as it is meant in the act*. One element of controversy is whether this noematic object is the same as the actual object of the act (assuming it exists) or is some kind of ideal object.

6.2.5 Empathy and Intersubjectivity

In phenomenology, empathy refers to the experience of another human body as another subjectivity. In one sense, you see another body, but what you immediately perceive or experience is another subject. In Husserl's original account, this was done by a sort of apperception built on the experiences of your own lived-body. The lived-body is your own body as experienced by yourself, *as yourself*. Your own body manifests itself to you mainly as your possibilities of acting in the world. It is what lets you reach out and grab something, for instance, but it also, and more importantly, allows for the possibility of changing your point of view. This helps you differentiate one thing from another by the experience of moving around it, seeing new aspects of it (often referred to as making the absent present and the present absent), and still retaining the notion that this is the same thing that you saw other aspects of just a moment ago (it is identical). Your body is also experienced as a duality, both

as object (you can touch your own hand) and as your own subjectivity (you are being touched).

The experience of your own body as your own subjectivity is then applied to the experience of another's body, which, through apperception, is constituted as another subjectivity. You can thus recognize the Other's intentions, emotions, etc. This experience of empathy is important in the phenomenological account of intersubjectivity. In phenomenology, intersubjectivity is what constitutes objectivity (i.e., what you experience as objective is experienced as being intersubjectively available - available to all other subjects. This does not imply that objectivity is reduced to subjectivity nor does it imply a relativist position, cf. for instance intersubjective verifiability).

In the experience of intersubjectivity, one also experiences oneself as being a subject among other subjects, and one experiences oneself as existing objectively *for* these Others; one experiences oneself as the noema of Others' noeses, or as a subject in another's empathic experience. As such, one experiences oneself as objectively existing subjectivity. Intersubjectivity is also a part in the constitution of one's lifeworld, especially as "homeworld."

6.2.6 Life world

The lifeworld (German: *Lebenswelt*) is the "world" each one of us *lives* in. One could call it the "background" or "horizon" of all experience, and it is that on which each object stands out as itself (as different) and with the meaning it can only hold for us. The lifeworld is both personal and intersubjective (it is then called a "homeworld," and it is shared by "homecomrades"), and, as such, it does not enclose each one of us in a solus ipse.

6.3 Husserl's *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900/1901)

In the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*, still under the influence of Brentano, Husserl describes his position as "descriptive psychology." Husserl analyzes the intentional structures of mental acts and how they are directed at both real and ideal objects. The first volume of the *Logical Investigations*, the *Prolegomena to Pure Logic*, begins with a devastating critique of psychologism, i.e., the attempt to subsume the *a priori* validity of the laws of logic under psychology. Husserl establishes a separate field for research in logic, philosophy, and phenomenology, independently from the empirical sciences.

6.4 Transcendental phenomenology after the *Ideen* (1913)

Some years after the publication of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl made some key elaborations which led him to the distinction between the act of consciousness (*noesis*) and the phenomena at which it is directed (the *noemata*).

- "noetic" refers to the intentional act of consciousness (believing, willing, etc.)
- "noematic" refers to the object or content (noema) which appears in the noetic acts (the believed, wanted, hated, and loved ...).

What we observe is not the object as it is in itself, but how and inasmuch it is given in the intentional acts. Knowledge of essences would only be possible by "bracketing" all assumptions about the existence of an external world and the inessential (subjective) aspects of how the object is concretely given to us. This procedure Husserl called *epoché*.

Husserl in a later period concentrated more on the ideal, essential structures of consciousness. As he wanted to exclude any hypothesis on the existence of external objects, he introduced the method of phenomenological reduction to eliminate them. What was left over was the pure transcendental ego, as opposed to the concrete empirical ego. Now (transcendental) phenomenology is the study of the essential structures that are left in pure consciousness: this amounts in practice to the study of the noemata and the relations among them. The philosopher Theodor Adorno criticised Husserl's concept of phenomenological epistemology in his metacritique *Against Epistemology*, which is anti-foundationalist in its stance.

Transcendental phenomenologists include Oskar Becker, Aron Gurwitsch, and Alfred Schutz.

6.5 Realist phenomenology

After Husserl's publication of the *Ideen* in 1913, many phenomenologists took a critical stance towards his new theories. Especially the members of the Munich group distanced themselves from his new transcendental phenomenology and preferred the earlier realist phenomenology of the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*.

Realist phenomenologists include Adolf Reinach, Alexander Pfänder, Johannes Daubert, Max Scheler, Roman Ingarden, Nicolai Hartmann, Dietrich von Hildebrand.

6.6 Existential phenomenology

Existential phenomenology differs from transcendental phenomenology by its rejection of the transcendental ego. Merleau-Ponty objects to the ego's transcendence of the world, which for Husserl leaves the world spread out and completely transparent before the conscious. Heidegger thinks of a conscious being as always already in the world. Transcendence is maintained in existential phenomenology to the extent that the method of phenomenology must take a presuppositionless starting point - transcending claims about the world arising from, for example, natural or scientific attitudes or theories of the ontological nature of the world.

While Husserl thought of philosophy as a scientific discipline that had to be founded on a phenomenology understood as epistemology, Heidegger held a radically different view. Heidegger himself states their differences this way:

For Husserl, the phenomenological reduction is the method of leading phenomenological vision from the natural attitude of the human being whose life is involved in the world of things and persons back to the transcendental life of consciousness and its noetic-noematic experiences, in which objects are constituted as correlates of consciousness. For us, phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological vision back from the apprehension of a being, whatever may be the character of that apprehension, to the understanding of the Being of this being (projecting upon the way it is unconcealed).

According to Heidegger, philosophy was not at all a scientific discipline, but more fundamental than science itself. According to him science is only one way of knowing the world with no special access to truth. Furthermore, the scientific mindset itself is built on a much more "primordial" foundation of practical, everyday knowledge. Husserl was skeptical of this approach, which he regarded as quasi-mystical, and it contributed to the divergence in their thinking.

Instead of taking phenomenology as *prima philosophia* or a foundational discipline, Heidegger took it as a metaphysical ontology: "*being is the proper and sole theme of philosophy...* this means that philosophy is not a science of beings but of being." Yet to confuse phenomenology and ontology is an obvious error. Phenomena are not the foundation or Ground of Being. Neither are they appearances, for as Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*, an appearance is "that which shows itself in something else," while a phenomenon is "that which shows itself in itself."

While for Husserl, in the epochè, being appeared only as a correlate of consciousness, for Heidegger being is the starting point. While for Husserl we would have to abstract from all concrete determinations of our empirical ego, to be able to turn to the field of pure consciousness, Heidegger claims that "the possibilities and destinies of philosophy are bound up with man's existence, and thus with temporality and with historicity."

However, ontological being and existential being are different categories, so Heidegger's conflation of these categories is, according to Husserl's view, the root of Heidegger's error. Husserl charged Heidegger with raising the question of ontology but failing to answer it, instead switching the topic to the Dasein, the only being for whom Being is an issue. That is neither ontology nor phenomenology, according to Husserl, but merely abstract anthropology. To clarify, perhaps, by abstract anthropology, as a non-existentialist searching for essences, Husserl rejected the existentialism implicit in Heidegger's distinction between being (sein) as things in reality and Being (Da-sein) as the encounter with being, as when being becomes present to us, that is, is unconcealed.

Existential phenomenologists include: Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), Hannah Arendt (1906 – 1975), Emmanuel Levinas (1906 – 1995), Gabriel Marcel (1889 – 1973), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980), Paul Ricoeur (1913 - 2005) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908 – 1961).

CHAPTER SEVEN

ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Given its Greek roots, the term *Ethnomethodology* literally means the “methods” that people use on a daily basis to accomplish their everyday lives. To put it slightly differently, the world is seen as an ongoing practical accomplishment. People are viewed as rational, but they use “practical reasoning”, not formal logic, in accomplishing their everyday lives.

1.1 Defining Ethnomethodology

We begin with the definition of *Ethnomethodology*, which is the study of the body of common-sense knowledge and the range of procedures and considerations 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.

We can gain further insight into the nature of ethnomethodology by examining efforts by its founder, Harold Garfinkel (1998), to define it. Like Durkheim, Garfinkel considers ‘social facts’ to be the fundamental sociological phenomenon. However, Garfinkel’s social facts are very different from Durkheim’s social facts. For Durkheim, social facts are external to and coercive of individuals. Those who adopt such a focus tend to see actors as constrained or determined by social structures and institutions and able to exercise little or no independent judgment. In the acerbic terms of the ethnomethodologist, such sociologists tend to treat actors like judgment dopes.

In contrast, ethnomethodology treats the objectivity of social facts as the accomplishment of members –as a product of members’ methodological activities. Garfinkel, in his inimitable and nearly impenetrable style, describes the focus of ethnomethodology as follows:

For ethnomethodology the objective reality of social facts, in that, and just how, it is every society’s locally, endogenously produced, naturally organized, reflexively accountable, ongoing, practical achievement, being everywhere, always, only, exactly and entirely, members’ work, with no time out, and with no possibility of evasion, hiding out, passing postponement, or by-outs, is thereby sociology’s fundamental phenomenon (Garfinkel, 1991).

To put it in another way, Ethnomethodology is concerned with the organization of everyday life, the immortal, ordinary society. Ethnomethodology is about the extraordinary organization of the ordinary.

Ethnomethodology is certainly not macrosociology in the sense intended by Durkheim and his concept of social fact, but its adherents do not see it as a microsociology either. Thus, while ethnomethodologists refuse to treat actors as judgmental dopes, they do not believe that people are almost endlessly reflective, self-conscious and calculative. Rather, they recognize

that most often action is routine and relatively unreflective. Ethnomethodologists do not focus on actors or individuals, but rather on ‘members’. However, members are viewed not as individuals, but rather ‘strictly and solely, [as] membership activities—the artful practices whereby they produce what are *for them* large-scale organization structure and small-scale interactional or personal structure. In sum, ethnomethodologists are interested in *neither* micro structures *nor* macro structures; they are concerned with the artful practices that produce *both* types of structures. Thus, what Garfinkel and the ethnomethodologists have sought is a new way of getting the traditional concern of sociology with objective structures, both micro and macro.

One of Garfinkel’s key points about ethnomethods is that they are ‘reflexively accountable’. *Accounts* are the ways in which actors explain, describe, criticize, and idealize specific situations. *Accounting* is the process by which people offer accounts in order to make sense of the world. Ethnomethodologists devote a lot of attention to analyze people’s accounts, as well as to the ways in which accounts are offered and accepted or objected by others. This is one of the reasons that ethnomethodologists are preoccupied with analyzing conversations. To take an example, when a student explains to his professor why she failed to take an examination, he is offering an account. The student is trying to make sense of an event for his professor. Ethnomethodologists are interested in the nature of that account but more generally in the *accounting practices* by which the student offers the account and the professor accepts or rejects it. In analyzing accounts, ethnomethodologists adopt a stance of *ethnomethodological indifference*. That is, they do not judge the nature of the accounts but rather analyze them in terms of how they are used in practical action. They are concerned with the accounts as well as the methods needed by both speaker and listener to proffer, understand, and accept or reject accounts.

Extending the idea of accounts, ethnomethodologists take great pains to point out that sociologists, like everyone else, offer accounts. Thus, reports of sociological studies can be seen as accounts and analyzed in the same way that all other accounts can be studied. This perspective on sociology serves to disenchant the work of sociologists, indeed all scientists. A good deal of sociology involves commonsense interpretations. Ethnomethodologists can study accounts of the sociologist in the same way that they can study the accounts of the layperson. Thus, the everyday practices of sociologists and all scientists come under the scrutiny of the ethnomethodologist.

We can say that accounts are reflexive in the sense that they enter unto the constitution of the state of affairs they make observable and are intended to deal with. Thus, in trying to describe what people are doing, we are altering the nature of what they are doing. This is as true for sociologists as it is for laypeople. In studying and reporting on social life, sociologists are, in the process, changing what they are studying. That is, subjects alter their behavior as a result of being the subject of scrutiny and in response to descriptions of that behavior.

1.2 The Diversification of Ethnomethodology

Ethnomethodology was ‘invented’ by Garfinkel beginning in the late 1940s, but it was first systematized with the publication of his *Studies in Ethnomethodology* in 1967. Over the

years, ethnomethodology has grown enormously and expanded in a number of different directions. Only a decade after the publication of *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, Don Zimmerman concluded that there already were several varieties of ethnomethodology. As Zimmerman put it, ethnomethodology encompassed a number of more or less distinct and sometimes incompatible lines of inquiry (1978). Ten years later, Paul Atkinson (1988) underscored the lack of coherence in ethnomethodology and argued further that at least some ethnomethodologists had strayed too far from the underlying premises of the approach. Thus, while it is a very vibrant type of sociological theory, ethnomethodology has experienced some increasing ‘growing pains’ in recent years. It is safe to say that ethnomethodology, its diversity, and its problems are likely to proliferate in coming years. After all, the subject matter of ethnomethodology is the infinite variety of everyday life. As a result, there will be many more studies, more diversification, and further ‘growing pains’.

1. Studies of Institutional Settings

Maynard and Clayman (1991) describe a number of varieties of ethnomethodology, but two stand out. The first type is *ethnomethodological studies of institutional settings*. Early ethnomethodological studies carried on by Garfinkel and his associates took place in casual, noninstitutionalized settings like home. Later, there was a move toward studying everyday practices in a wide variety of institutional settings—courtrooms, medical settings, and police departments. The goal of such studies is an understanding of the way people perform their official tasks and, in the process, constitute the institution in which the tasks take place.

Conventional sociological studies of such institutional settings focus on their structure, formal rules, and official procedures to explain what people do within them. To the ethnomethodologist, such external constraints are inadequate for explaining what really goes on in these institutions. People are not determined by these external forces; rather, they use them to accomplish their tasks and to create the institution in which they exist. People employ their practical procedures not only to make their daily lives but also to manufacture the institutions’ products. For example, the crime rates compiled by the police department are not merely the result of officials’ following clearly defined rules in their production. Rather, officials utilize a range of common-sense procedures to decide, for example, whether victims should be classified as homicides. Thus, such rates are based on the interpretive work of professionals, and this kind of record keeping is a practical activity worthy of study in its own right.

2. Conversation Analysis

The second variety of ethnomethodology is *conversation analysis*. The goal of conversation analysis is the detailed understanding of the fundamental structures of conversational interaction. *Conversation* is defined in terms that are in line with the basic elements of ethnomethodological perspective: conversation is an *interactional activity* exhibiting *stable, orderly* properties that are the analyzable *achievements* of the conversants (Zimmerman, 1988). While there are rules and procedures for conversations, they do not determine what is said but rather are used to ‘accomplish’ a conversation. The focus of conversational analysis is the constraints on what is said that are internal to conversation itself and not external forces that constrain talks. Conversations are seen as internally, sequentially ordered.

Zimmerman details five basic working principles of conversation analysis. First, conversation analysis requires the collection and analysis of highly detailed data on conversations. This data includes not only words but also “the hesitations, cut-offs, restarts, silences, breathing noises, throat clearings, sniffles, laughter, and laughterlike noises, prosody, and the like, not to mention the ‘nonverbal’ behaviors available on video records that are usually closely integrated with the stream of activity captured on the audiotape” (Zimmerman, 1988). All these things are part of most conversations, and they are seen as methodic devices in the making of a conversation by the actor involved.

Second, even the finest devices in the making of a conversation must be presumed to be an orderly accomplishment. Such minute aspects of a conversation are not ordered just by the ethnomethodologist; they are first “ordered by the methodical activities of the social actors themselves.

Third, interaction in general and conversation in particular have stable, orderly properties that are the achievements of the actors involved. In looking at conversations, ethnomethodologists treat them as if they were autonomous, separable from the cognitive processes of the actors as well as the larger context in which they take place.

Fourth, the fundamental framework of conversation is sequential organization. Finally, and relatedly, the course of conversational interaction is managed on a turn-by-turn or local basis. Here Zimmerman invokes the distinction between ‘context-shaped’ and ‘context-renewing’ conversation. Conversations are context-shaped in the sense that what is said at any given moment is shaped by the preceding sequential context of the conversation. Conversations are context-renewing in that what is being said in the present turn becomes part of the context for future turns.

Methodologically, conversation analysts are led to study conversations in naturally occurring situations, often using audiotape or videotape. This method allows information to flow from the everyday world rather than being imposed on it by the researcher. The researcher can examine and reexamine an actual conversation in minute detail instead of relying on his/her notes. This technique also allows the researcher to do highly detailed analyses of conversations.

Conversation analysis based on the assumption that conversations are the bedrock of other forms of interpersonal relations. They are the most pervasive form of interaction, and a conversation consists of the fullest matrix of socially organized communicative practices and procedures.

As it has been already stated the goal of conversation analysis is to study the taken-for-granted ways in which conversation is organized. Conversation analysts are concerned with the relationships among utterances in a conversation rather than in the relationships between speakers and hearers.

Telephone Conversations: Identification and Recognition

Emanuel A. Schegloss (1979) viewed his examination of the way in which telephone conversations are opened as part of the larger effort to understand the orderly character of social interaction:

The work in which my colleagues and I have been engaged is concerned with the *organization of social interaction*. We bring to materials with which we work—audio and videotapes of *naturally occurring* interaction, and transcripts of those tapes—an interest in *detecting and describing* the *orderly* phenomena of which conversation and interaction are composed, and an interest in depicting the *systematic organizations* by reference to which those phenomena are produced (Schegloff, 1979).

This interest extends to various orderly phenomena within interaction, such as the organization of turn making in conversations and the ways in which people seek to repair breaches in normal conversational procedures. In addition, there is an interest in the overall structure of a conversation, including openings, closings, and regularly recurring internal sequences.

In this context Schegloff looked at the opening of a phone conversation, which he defined as a place where the type of conversation being opened can be proffered, displayed, accepted, rejected, modified—in short, incipiently constituted by the parties to it. Although the talk one hears on the phone is no different from that in face-to-face conversations, the participants lack visual contact. Schegloff focused on one element of phone conversations not found in face-to-face conversations, the sequence by which the parties who have no visual contact identify and recognize each other.

Schegloff found that telephone openings are often quite straightforward and standardized:

- A. Hello?
- B. Shar'n
- A. Hi!

(Schegloff, 1979)

But some openings “look and sound idiosyncratic—almost virtuoso performances” (Schegloff, 1979):

- A. Hello.
- B. Hello Margie?
- A. Yes.
- B. hhh We do painting, antiquing,
- A. is that right.
- B. en, hh—hhh
- A. hnh, hnh, hnh
- B. nhh,hnh,hnh! hh

- A. hh
- B. keep people's pa'r tools
- A. y(hhh)! hnh, hnh
- B. I'm sorry about that—that—I din't see that

Although such openings may be different from the usual openings, they are not without their organization. They are engendered by a systematic sequential organization adapted and fitted by the parties to some particular circumstances. For example, the preceding conversation is almost incomprehensible until we understand that B is calling to apologize for keeping some borrowed power tools too long. B makes a joke out of it by building it into a list (painting, antiquing), and it is only at the end when both are laughing that the apology comes.

Schegloff's conclusion was that even very idiosyncratic cases are to be examined for their organizational pattern:

Particular cases can, therefore, be examined for their local, interactional, biographical, ethnographic, or other idiosyncratic interest. The same materials can be inspected so as to extract from their local particularities the formal organization into which their particulars are infused. For students of interaction, the organizations through which the work of social life gets accomplished occupy the center of attention (Schegloff, 1979).

The key work in the origins of ethnomethodology was written by Garfinkel (1967). It focuses on the way that meanings are constructed in the way suggested by phenomenological approaches, but suggests that these should be investigated as a kind of method that people develop in order to deal with everyday experiences. What is interesting is an analysis of the way this method works, how it is constructed and therefore how people use it to construct meanings and localized worlds. The world is therefore seen as a product of these constructions of meaning. Clearly this implies a total rejection of any notion of social structure separate from the meanings of individuals interacting in localized settings. To use Garfinkel's phrase, social order is 'participant produced'. The way in which people actively construct meanings and therefore make their everyday experience understandable is precisely the way social order is produced. This is the basis of social order. While the question of the basis of social order is most famously associated with Parsons's functionalism, Garfinkel was concerned to look at all the assumptions Parsons made about society and consider them instead as problematic areas in need of investigation;

Although sociologists take socially structured scenes of everyday life as a point of departure they rarely see, as a task of sociological inquiry in its own right, the general question of how any such common sense world is possible. Instead the possibility of the everyday world is either settled by theoretical representation of merely assumed. ...My purpose in this paper are to demonstrate the essential relevance, to sociological inquiries, of a concern for common sense activities as a topic of inquiry in its own right and by reporting a series of studies, to urge its 'rediscovery' (Garfinkel, 1967).

1.3 The Breaching Experiment

This idea about the way everyday social order is actively created can be seen in the breaching experiments documented by Garfinkel in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (1967). These were concerned with a central element of the ethnomethodological analysis, namely the existence of rules on which everyday behavior is based. However the rules are not conceived of as fixed, but as starting points which may then be broken, bent, reinterpreted or not. Precisely because they exist, social life is possible, but because they exist in our consciousness we often forget they exist. Garfinkel set out to demonstrate their existence by getting researchers to consciously break certain rules, thus making commonplaces scenes visible.

A few examples of these studies will demonstrate the general approach. Students were asked to involve in conversations but to respond to every statement by asking “What do you mean?” Since this breaches normal rules, it elicits often hostile responses as the following extract shows:

(S) Hi, Ray. How is your girl friend feeling?

(E) What do you mean, ‘How is she feeling?’ Do you mean physical or mental?

(S) I mean how is she feeling? What’s the matter with you? (He looked peeved)

(E) Nothing. Just explain a little clearer what do you mean?

(S) Skip it. How are your Med School applications coming?

(E) What do you mean, ‘How are they?’

(S) You know what I mean.

(E) I really don’t.

(S) What is the matter with you? Are you sick?

(Garfinkel, 1967).

In other experiments, Garfinkel instructed students to spend 15-60 minutes in their parents’ home acting as if they were paying lodgers. The point was to try to get students to look at familiar activities (family interaction) from a new viewpoint and also to breach the conventions of the rules concerning such a situation to see what happens. Parents interpreted the odd behavior of their offspring in a variety of ways, from believing that they wanted something and were therefore being extra-nice through to concerns that they were sick. These reveal both that are broken, but also that they act to make sense of the situation, to construct some meaning which explains the unforeseen event. In this respect, Garfinkel argued that people actively construct meanings and that this showed the falsity of views which saw people as passive creations of society, as, for example, in functionalism.

This idea of the construction of meaning was also explored by Garfinkel through an experiment in counselling. If it can be shown that people make sense of a situation that has no sense then this notion that sense and meaning are constructed is underlined. He invited students to get involved in a new form of counseling. The two people involved would sit in separate rooms and communicate via an intercom. This allowed Garfinkel to set up a situation where the 'counselor' was instructed to answer only 'yes' or 'no' to questions and the answer they gave would be determined by reference to a random number table. This creates a situation where all possible objective sense is removed. Nonetheless, he found that people being counseled found it helpful and used their own experiences and meanings to make sense of this situation.

1.4 Criticisms of Ethnomethodology

The question of whether this illustrates anything beyond the level of everyday experiences is open to question. While ethnomethodologists would argue that there is nothing beyond this level, the more structurally-inclined sociologists would point to a number of examples of things that happen which people do not need to make sense of. For example, the dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima can be seen as an instance of that city without them ever having to consider its meaning or make sense of it. The bomb will still kill you even if there is no construction of meaning. Although the ethnomethodologists concentrate on the construction of meaning, they do not talk about the ways in which meaning can sometimes be imposed and they have no explanation of why people would adopt certain meanings. The implication of this criticism is that the way people construct meanings does not only depend on what is happening in a local context but on their placement and experiences in the wider world. This requires a notion of social structures which exist beyond localized meanings. Some notion of power and interests therefore needs to be integrated for ethnomethodology to be useful.

It is therefore argued that such studies simply concentrate on the trivial aspects of life and only tell us what we know already. In their account of ethnomethodology, Haralambos and Holborn (1995) quote the criticisms of ethnomethodology made by Gouldner who developed a parody of an ethnomethodological experiment:

An ethnomethodologist might release chickens in a town centre during the rush hour, and stand back and observe as traffic was held up and crowds began to gather and laugh at policemen chasing the chickens. Gouldner goes on to say that Garfinkel might say that the community has now learned the importance of one hitherto unnoticed rule at the basis of everyday life: chickens must not be dropped in the streets in the midst of the lunch rush hour. (Haralambos and Holborn, 1995)

The emphasis on the ever-changing nature of reality, and therefore the impossibility of ever arriving at a final truth, has in more recent times been taken up by post-structuralist and post-modernist influenced sociologists, though with the important difference that here, social actors are back in the role of cultural dope ultimately powerless in the face of the mass media. In one sense, therefore, the insights about the continual relativity of meaning remains part of sociology.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EXCHANGE AND RATIONAL CHOICE THEORIES

Introduction

In this chapter, we will focus on two related theories; exchange and rational choice theory. Rational choice theory was one of the intellectual influences that helped shape the development of exchange theory, especially its tendency to assume a rational actor. However, while contemporary exchange theory continues to demonstrate the influences of rational choice theory, it has been affected by other intellectual currents and has gone off in a series of unique directions. Thus, contemporary exchange and rational choice theories are far from coterminous. One fundamental difference is that while rational choice theorists focus on individual decision making, the basic unit of analysis to the exchange theorist is the social relationship. Recently, exchange theorists have been devoting more attention to networks of social relationships, and this focus tends to connect them with network theory itself.

8.1 Exchange Theory

We begin with an overview of the history of the development of exchange theory, beginning with its roots in behaviorism.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism is best known in psychology, but in sociology it had both direct effects in behavioral sociology, and indirect effects, especially on exchange theory. The behavioral sociologist is concerned with the relationship between the effects of actor's behavior on the environment and their impact on the actor's later behavior. This relationship is basic to *operant conditioning*, or the learning process by which behavior is modified by its consequences. One might almost think of this behavior, at least initially in the infant, as a random behavior. The environment in which the behavior exists, be it social or physical, is affected by the behavior and in turn 'acts' back in various ways. The reaction, negative, positive, or neutral, affects the actor's later behavior. If the reaction has been rewarding to the actor, the same behavior is likely to be emitted in the future in similar situations. If the reaction has been painful or pushing, the behavior is less likely to occur in the future. The behavioral sociologist is interested in the relationship between the *history* of environmental reactions or consequences and the nature of present behavior. Past consequences of a given behavior govern its present state. By knowing what elicited a certain behavior in the past, we can predict whether an actor will produce the same behavior in the present situation.

Of great interest to behaviorists are the rewards (or reinforcers) and costs (or punishments). Rewards are defined by their ability to strengthen behavior, while costs reduce the likelihood of behavior. As we will see, behaviorism in general, and the ideas of rewards and costs in particular, had a powerful impact on early exchange theory.

8.2 Rational Choice Theory

The basic principles of rational choice theory are derived from neoclassical economics, as well as utilitarianism and game theory. Based on a variety of different methods, the skeletal model of rational choice theory is described here then.

The focus of rational choice theory is on actors. Actors are seen as being purposive, or as having intentionality. That is actors have ends or goals toward which their actions are aimed. Actors are also seen as having preferences (or values, utilities). Rational choice theory is unconcerned with what these preferences, or their sources, are. Of importance is the fact that action is undertaken to achieve objectives that are consistent with an actor's preference hierarchy.

Although rational choice theory starts with actors' purposes or intentions, it must take into consideration at least two major constraints on action. First is the scarcity of resources. Actors have different resources as well as differential access to other resources. For those with lots of resources, the achievement of ends may be relatively easy. However, for those with few, resources, the attainment of ends may be difficult or impossible.

Related to scarcity of resources is the idea of *opportunity costs*. In pursuing a given end, actors must keep an eye on the costs of forgoing their next-most-attractive action. An actor may choose not to pursue the most highly valued end if her resources are negligible, if as a result the chances of achieving that end are slim, and if in striving to achieve that end she jeopardizes her chances of achieving her next-most-valued end. Actors are seen as trying to maximize their benefits, and that goal may involve assessing the relationship between the chances of achieving a primary end and what achievement does for chances for attaining the second next-most-valuable objective.

A second source of constraints on individual action is social institutions. An individual will typically find his or her actions checked from birth to death by familial and school rules; laws and ordinances; firm policies; churches, synagogues and mosques; and hospitals and funeral parlors. By restricting the feasible set of courses of action available to individuals, enforceable rules of the game, including norms, laws, agendas, and voting rules, systematically affect social outcomes. These institutional constraints provide both positive and negative sanctions that serve to encourage certain actions and to discourage others.

Two other ideas can be enumerated that are seen as basic to rational choice theory. The first is an aggregation mechanism, or the process by which the separate individual actions are combined to produce the social outcome. The second is the importance of information in making rational choices. At one time, it was assumed that actors had perfect, or at least sufficient, information to make purposive choices among the alternative courses of action open to them. However, there is a growing recognition that the quantity or quality of available information is highly variable and that variability has profound effect on actor's choices.

At least in its early formation, exchange theory was affected by a rudimentary theory of rationality. Later we will deal with some of the greater complexity associated with rational choice theory.

8.3 The Exchange Theory of George Homans

The heart of George Homans's exchange theory lies in a set of fundamental propositions. Although some of Homans's propositions deal with at least two interacting individuals, he was careful to point out that these propositions are based on psychological principles. According to Homans, they are psychological for two reasons. First, they are usually stated and empirically tested by persons who call themselves psychologists. Second, and more important, they are psychological because of the level at which they deal with the individual in society: *they are propositions about the behavior of individual human beings, rather than propositions about groups or societies as such: and the behavior of men, as men, is generally considered the province of psychology.* As a result of this proposition, Homans admitted to being what has been called a psychological reductionist. Reductionism, to Homans (1984), is the process of showing how the propositions of one named science [in this case, sociology] follow in logic from the more general propositions of another named science [in this case, psychology].

Although Homans made the case for psychological principles, he did not think of individuals as isolated. He recognized that people are social and spend a considerable portion of their time interacting with other people. He attempted to explain social behavior with psychological principles; what Homans's position does assume is that the general propositions of psychology, which are propositions about the effects of human behavior or the results thereof, do not change when the results come from other men rather than from the physical environment. Homans did not deny the Durkheimian position that something new emerges from interaction. Instead, he argued that those emergent properties can be explained by psychological principles: there is no need for new sociological propositions to explain social facts. He used the basic sociological concept of a norm as illustration:

The great example of a social fact is a social norm, and the norms of the groups to which they belong certainly constrain towards conformity the behavior of many more individuals. The question is not that of the existence of constraint, but of its explanation. The norm does not constrain automatically: individuals conform, when they do so, because they perceive it is to their net advantage to conform, and it is psychology that deals with the effect on behavior of perceived advantage (Homans, 1967).

Homans detailed a program to 'bring men back in [to]' sociology, but he also tried to develop a theory that focuses on psychology, people, and the "elementary forms of social life". According to Homans, this theory envisages social *behavior* as an exchange of activity, tangible or intangible, and more or less rewarding or costly, between at least two persons (Homans, 1961).

For example, Homans sought to explain the development of power-driven machinery in the textile industry, and thereby the Industrial Revolution, through the psychological principle that people are likely to act in such a way as to increase their rewards. More generally, in his version of exchange theory, he sought to explain elementary social behavior in terms of rewards and costs. He was motivated in part by the structural-functional theories of Talcott Parsons. To Homans, the structural functionalists did little more than create conceptual categories and schemes. He admitted that a scientific sociology needs such categories, but sociology also needs a set of general propositions about the relations among the categories, for without such propositions explanation is impossible. No explanation without propositions (Homans, 1974). Humans, therefore, set for himself the task of developing those propositions that focus on the psychological level: these form the ground work for exchange theory.

In *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms* (1961), Homans acknowledge that his exchange theory is derived from both behavioral psychology and elementary economics (rational choice theory). In fact, Homans regrets that his theory was labeled “exchange theory” because he sees it as a behavioral psychology applied to specific situations. Humans began with a discussion of the exemplar of the behaviorist paradigm, particularly B. F. Skinner’s study of pigeons:

Suppose, then, that a fresh or naïve pigeon is in its cage in the laboratory. One of the items in its inborn repertory of behavior which it uses to explore its environment is the peck. As the pigeon wanders around the cage pecking away, it happens to hit a round red target, at which point the waiting psychologists or, it may be, an automatic machine feeds it grain. The evidence is that the probability of the pigeon’s emitting the behavior again—the probability, that is, of its not just pecking but pecking on the target—has increased. In Skinner’s language, the pigeon’s behavior in pecking the target is an *operant*; the operant has been *reinforced*; grain is the *reinforcer*; and the pigeon has undergone *operant conditioning*. Should we prefer our language to be ordinary English, we may say that the pigeon has learned to peck the target by being rewarded for doing so (Homans, 1961, cited in Ritzer and Douglas, 2007).

Skinner was interested in this instance in pigeons; Homans’s concern was humans. According to Homans, Skinner’s pigeons are not engaged in a true exchange relationship with the psychologist. The pigeon is engaged in a one-sided exchange relationship, whereas human exchanges are at least two-sided. The pigeon is being reinforced by the grain, but the psychologist is not truly being reinforced by the pecks of the pigeon. The pigeon is carrying on the same sort of relationship with the psychologist as it would with the physical environment. Because there is no reciprocity, Homans defined this as *individual behavior*. Humans seemed to relegate the study of this sort of behavior to the psychologist, whereas he argued the sociologist to study social behavior where the activity of each of at least two animals reinforces. However, it is significant that, according to Homans, *no new propositions* are needed to explain social behavior as opposed to individual behavior. The laws of individual behavior as developed by Skinner in his study of the pigeons explain social behavior as long as we take into account the complications of mutual reinforcement. Humans

admitted that he might ultimately have to go beyond the principles derived by Skinner, but only reluctantly.

In his theoretical work, Homans restricted himself to every day social interaction. It is clear, however, that he believed that a sociology built on his principles would ultimately be able to explain all social behavior. Here is the case Homans used to exemplify the kind of exchange relationship he was interested in:

Suppose that two men are doing paperwork jobs in an office. According to the office rules, each should do his job by himself, or, if he needs help, he should consult the supervisor. One of the men, whom we shall call Person, is not skillful at the work and would get done better and faster if he got help from time to time. In spite of the rules he is reluctant to go to the supervisor, for to confess his incompetence might hurt his chances for promotion. Instead, he seeks out the other man, whom we shall call Other for short, and asks him for help. Other is more experienced at the work than is Person; he can do his work well and quickly and be left with time to spare, and he has reason to suppose that the supervisor will not go out of his way to look for a breach of rules. Other gives Person help and in return Person gives Other thanks and expressions of approval. The two men have exchanged help and approval.

(Homans, 1961, cited in Ritzer and Douglas, 2007).

Focusing on this sort of situation, and basing his ideas in Skinner's findings, humans developed several propositions.

The Success Proposition

For all actions taken by persons, the more often a particular action of a person is rewarded, the more likely the person is to perform that action (Homans, 1974).

In terms of Homans's Person-Other example in an office situation, this proposition means that a person is more likely to ask others for advice if he or she has been rewarded in the past with useful advice. Furthermore, the more often a person received useful advice in the past, the more often he or she will request more advice. Similarly, the other person will be more willing to give advice and give it more frequently if he or she often has been rewarded with approval in the past. Generally, behavior in accord with the success proposition involves three stages: first, a person's action; next, a rewarded result; and finally, a repetition of the original action or at minimum one similar in at least some respects.

Humans specified a number of things about the success proposition. First, although it is generally true that increasingly frequent rewards lead to increasingly frequent actions, this reciprocation cannot go on indefinitely. At some point individuals simply cannot act that way as frequently. Second, the shorter the interval between behavior and reward, the more likely a person is to repeat the behavior. Conversely, long intervals between behavior and reward lower the likelihood of repeat behavior. Finally, it was Homans's view that intermittent

rewards are more likely to elicit repeat behavior than regular rewards. Regular rewards lead to boredom and satiation; whereas rewards at irregular intervals are very likely to elicit repeat behavior.

The Stimulus Proposition

If in the past the occurrence of a particular stimulus, or set of stimuli, has been the occasion on which a person's action has been rewarded, then the more similar the present stimuli are to the past ones, the more likely the person is to perform the action, or some similar action (Homans, 1974).

Again, we look at Homans's office example. If, in the past, Person and Other found the giving and getting of advice rewarding, then they are likely to engage in similar actions in similar situations in the future. Homans offered an even more down-to-earth example: *A fisherman who has cast his line into a dark pool and has caught a fish becomes more apt to fish in dark pools again.*

Homans was interested in the process of *generalization*, that is, the tendency to extend behavior to similar circumstances. In the fishing example, one aspect of generalization would be to move from fishing in dark pools to fishing in any pool with any degree of shadiness. Similarly, success in catching fish is likely to lead from one kind of fishing to another even from fishing to hunting.

The Value Proposition

The more valuable to a person is the result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action (Homans, 1974).

In the office example, if the rewards each offers to the other are considered valuable, then the actors are more likely to perform the desired behaviors than if the rewards are not valuable. At this point, Homans introduced the concepts of rewards and punishments. Rewards are actions with positive values: an increase in rewards is more likely to elicit the desired behavior. Punishments are actions with negative values; an increase in punishments means that the actor is less likely to manifest undesired behaviors. Homans found punishments to be an inefficient means of getting people to change their behavior, because people may react in undesirable ways to the punishment. It is preferable simply not to reward undesirable behavior; then such behavior eventually becomes extinguished. Rewards are clearly to be preferred, but they may be in short supply. Homans did make it clear that his is not simply a hedonistic theory; rewards can be either materialistic or altruistic.

The Deprivation-satiation Proposition

The more often in the recent past a person has received a particular reward, the less valuable any further unit of that reward becomes for him (Homans, 1974).

In the office, Person and Other may reward each other so often for giving and getting advice that the rewards cease to be valuable to each other. Time is crucial here; people are less likely to become satiated if particular rewards are stretched over a long period of time.

At this point, Homans defined two other critical concepts: cost and benefit. The cost of any behavior is defined as the rewards lost in forgoing alternative lines of action. Profit in social exchange is seen as the greater number of rewards gained over costs incurred. The later led humans to recast the deprivation-satiation proposition as the greater profit a person receives as a result of his action, the more likely he is to perform the action.

The Rationality Proposition

In choosing between alternative actions, a person will choose that one for which, as perceived by him at the time. The value, V , for the result, multiplied by the probability, p , of getting the result, is the greater (Homans, 1974).

While the earlier propositions rely heavily on behaviorism, the rationality proposition demonstrates most clearly the influence of rational choice theory on Homans's approach. In economic terms, actors who act in accord with the rationality proposition are maximizing their utilities.

Basically, people examine and make calculations about the various alternative actions open to them. They compare the amount of rewards associated with each course of action. They also calculate the likelihood that they will actually receive the rewards. Highly valued rewards will be devalued if the actors think it unlikely that they will obtain them. On the other hand, lesser-valued rewards will be enhanced if they are seen as highly attainable. Thus, there is an interaction between the value of the reward and the likelihood of attainment. The most desirable rewards are those that are *both* very valuable and highly attainable. The least desirable rewards are those that are not very valuable and are unlikely to be attained.

Homans relates the rationality proposition to the success, stimulus, and value propositions. The rationality proposition tells us that whether or not people will perform an action depends on their perceptions of the probability of success. But, what determines this perception? Homans argues that perceptions of whether chances of success are high or low are shaped by past success and the similarity of the present situation to past successful situations. The rationality proposition also does not tell us why an actor values one reward more than another; for this we need the value proposition. In these ways, Homans links rationality principle to his more behavioristic propositions.

In the end Homans's theory can be condensed to a view of the actor as a rational profit seeker. However, Homans's theory was weak on mental states and large-scale structures. Despite such weaknesses, Homans remained a behaviorist who worked resolutely at the level of individual behavior. He argued that large-scale structures can be understood if we adequately understand elementary social behavior. He contended that exchange processes are "identical" at the individual and societal levels, although he granted that at the societal level, the way the fundamental processes are combined is more complex.

8.4 Critiques

Katherine Miller outlines several major objections to or problems with the social exchange theory as developed from early seminal works (Miller 2005):

- The theory reduces human interaction to a purely rational process that arises from economic theory.
- The theory favors openness as it was developed in the 1970s when ideas of freedom and openness were preferred, but there may be times when openness isn't the best option in a relationship.
- The theory assumes that the ultimate goal of a relationship is intimacy when this might not always be the case.
- The theory places relationships in a linear structure, when some relationships might skip steps or go backwards in terms of intimacy.

It also is strongly seated in an individualist mindset, which may limit its application in and description of collectivist cultures.