

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### THE ROLE OF SOCIOLOGY IN CULTURAL STUDIES

Sociology as a discipline is a grand late nineteenth century construction which attempted to find laws to explain the structure and function of society. Three or four generations on from its heyday Sociology has often been redefined into Social Studies, which reflects the post-modernist suspicion of large-scale constructs and meta-narratives. It always had to fight its corner against other disciplines, such as anthropology and political theory and the growth of cultural studies and media studies have taken away some of its areas of research.

Nevertheless, sociology has contributed enormously to the way we think about and carry out research into contemporary society. It was the invention of a nineteenth century Social Darwinist, Herbert Spencer (1820-193), whose ideas are virtually forgotten but who exerted an extraordinary intellectual influence during his life from literature to Biology. It was Spencer who coined the phrase "**survival of the fittest**." His *Principles of Sociology* (first published 1875) was the third in a lifelong project to bring together human knowledge. Although he was responsible for conceiving the idea of a social discipline his notions of social Darwinism had little impact on the development of sociology.

In modern terms a sociological theory is a set of ideas that provides an explanation for human society. These theories are selective in terms of their perspectives and the data they define as significant. As a result they provide a particular and partial view of reality. Sociological theories can be grouped together according to various criteria. The most important of these is the distinction between **Structural** and **Social Action** theories.

Structural theory analyses the way society fits together. It regards society as a system of relationships that create the society in which we live. It is this structure that determines our lives and characters. Structured sets of social relationships lie below the appearance of the free individual of western individualism. Structuralism focuses on the particular set of structural laws that apply in a society.

Despite their differences, both **Functionalism** and **Marxism** use a model of how society as a whole works. Many functionalists base their model of society around the assumption of basic needs to explain how different parts of society help to meet those needs. Marxists, on the other hand, see society as resting upon an economic base or infrastructure with a superstructure above it. They see society as divided into social classes which are in conflict with each other.

The main differences between Functionalist and Marxist perspectives are the way they characterize social structure. Functionalists stress the extent to which the different elements of social structure fit together. Marxists stress the lack of fit between different parts, especially social classes, and so emphasize the potential for social conflict. Traditional Sociology involves a discussion of Marxist theory. However, because of its imperative for political action the discussion on Marxism has been deferred to the chapter on politics. This does not preclude reference to Marxism particular in the introduction to the work of Max Weber.

Not all sociological perspectives base their analysis upon an examination of the structure of society. Rather than seeing human behaviour as being largely determined by society, they see society as being the product of human activity. They stress the meaningfulness of human behaviour, denying that it is primarily determined by the structure of society. These approaches are known as social action theory, interpretive sociology or microsociology.

Much of the subject matter of conventional sociology overlaps with other disciplines. As well as politics, anthropology has contributed to sociology, for example, in research on the family and in contemporary disciplines Media Studies have taken much of the content which previously was the exclusive domain of Sociology. This chapter will look at two seminal thinkers, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber and a contemporary theorist, Anthony Giddens.

### **EMILE DURKHEIM (1858 -1917)**

Emile Durkheim was born the son of a rabbi in Eastern France. At first he wished to train as a rabbi whilst following a secular education, but in his teens he had a mystical experience which resulted in a temporary interest in Catholicism. Later he became an agnostic and prepared for the examinations to the Ecole Normale Superieure to which he gained admission at the third attempt. Although his desire to learn scientific method and contemporary philosophy were at odds with the Ecole's literary bias he learnt a rigorous research and scientific method and the presence of discontinuities between the analyses of different levels of phenomena.

After some years teaching at provincial lycées Durkheim was appointed to the staff of Bordeaux University in 1887 following a year's sabbatical study in Germany where he produced a well-received report on German Social sciences. A special social science course was created for him which was the first time that a French university allowed the teaching of philosophy. In 1896 he was appointed a full professor, three years after gaining his PhD and in 1902 he was appointed to the Sorbonne where he became Professor of the Science of Education in 1906 and the name of his chair was changed in 1913 to Science of Education and Sociology by ministerial decree.

In those years Durkheim had established Sociology as a major intellectual discipline in France with works of his own, **The Division of Labour**, **Rules of Sociological Method** and **Suicide**. He also founded a journal, **L'Anée Sociologique**, in 1898 which attracted a number of brilliant young scholars and enabled a wider public to learn the depth and scope of sociology. Durkheim's work aroused interest and controversy and created a Durheimian school which was eager to advocate and defend sociology.

### **DURKHEIM'S IDEAS**

The main impulse behind Durkheim's thinking is his insistence that the study of society must give up a reductionist approach and consider social phenomena in themselves. Rejecting biological or psychological interpretations, Durkheim focused attention on the social-structural factors in humankind's social issues.

Durkheim presented a definitive criticism of reductionist explanations of social behaviour. **Social phenomena are "social facts"** and these are the subject matter of sociology. They have distinctive social characteristics and causes which can't be explained at a biological or psychological level. They are external to any particular individual considered as a biological entity. They last over time while particular individuals die and are replaced by others. Constraints, whether in the form of laws or customs, come into play whenever social demands are violated. These sanctions are imposed on individuals and channel and direct their desires and inclinations. A social fact can be defined as "every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint."

Although in his early work Durkheim defined social facts by their exteriority and constraint, focusing his main concern on the operation of the legal system, he was later moved to change his views. The mature Durkheim stressed that social facts and moral rules become effective guides and controls of conduct only in terms of how much they become part of individual consciousness, while continuing to exist independently of individuals. Constraint is

no longer a simple imposition of outside controls on individual will, but rather a moral obligation to obey a rule. In this sense **society is "something beyond us and something in ourselves."** Durkheim tried to study social facts not only as phenomena "out there" in the world of objects, but as facts that the actor and the social scientist come to know.

Social phenomena arise, Durkheim argued, when interacting individuals constitute a reality that can no longer be accounted for in terms of individual actors.

"The determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states of the individual consciousness."

A political party, for example, though composed of individual members, cannot be explained in terms of its constitutive elements. Instead, a party is a structural whole that must be accounted for by the social and historical forces that bring it into being and allow it to operate. Any social formation, though not necessarily superior to its individual parts, is different from them and demands an explanation on the level appropriate to it.

Durkheim was concerned with the characteristics of groups and structures rather than with individual attributes. He focused on such problems as **the cohesion or lack of cohesion of specific religious groups**, not on the individual traits of religious believers. He showed that such group properties are independent of individual traits and must therefore be studied in their own right. He examined different rates of behaviour in specified populations and the characteristics of particular groups or changes in these characteristics. For example, a significant increase of suicide rates in a particular group indicates that the social cohesion in that group has been weakened and its members are no longer sufficiently protected against existential crises.

In order to explain regular differential rates of suicide in various religious or occupational groupings, Durkheim studied the character of these groups, their characteristic ways of bringing about cohesion and solidarity among their members. He did not concern himself with the psychological traits or motives of individuals in these groups as these vary. In contrast, the structures that have high suicide rates all have in common a relative lack of cohesion, a condition of relative normlessness.

Concern with the rates of occurrence of specific phenomena rather than with incidence had an additional advantage in that it allowed Durkheim to engage in comparative analysis of various structures. By comparing the rates of suicides in various groups, he was able to avoid subjective explanations of a particular group and reach an overall generalization. By this procedure he came to the conclusion that the general notion of cohesion or integration could account for a number of differing specific rates of suicide in a variety of group contexts. Groups differ in the degree of their integration. Some groups may integrate their members fully whilst others may leave individuals a great deal of freedom of action. Durkheim demonstrated that suicide varies inversely with the degree of integration. **"When society is strongly integrated, it holds individuals under its control."** People who are well integrated into a group are protected for a significant extent from the impact of frustrations and tragedies and are thus are less likely to resort to extreme behaviour such as suicide.

Durkheim distinguished between **mechanical and organic solidarity**. The first prevails to the extent that "ideas and tendencies common to all members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those which pertain personally to each member. This solidarity can grow only in inverse ratio to personality." In other words, mechanical solidarity prevails where individual differences are minimized and the members of society are much alike in their devotion to common objectives. Organic solidarity, in contrast, develops out of differences, rather than likenesses, between individuals. It is a product of the division of

labour. With increasing elaboration of functions in a society there are a greater number of differences between its members.

The mature Durkheim understood that only if all members of a society adhered to common sets of symbolic representations and to common assumptions about the world around them, could moral unity be assured. Without this adherence Durkheim argued, any society, whether primitive or modern, was bound to degenerate and decay.

### **MAX WEBER (1864 – 1920)**

Max Weber was born in Berlin, the son of a local politician and a Calvinist mother. He studied law at Heidelberg University and came under the influence of his mother's brother, a liberal protestant intellectual. After completing his military service he resumed his studies at Berlin University in both history and law. He worked incredibly hard and by 1893 he had completed his "habilitationsschrift" and was lecturing as a Docent at Berlin University at the same time practising law. In 1893 he married a cousin and left the control of his father which he resented. In 1896 he was recalled to Heidelberg where he became Professor of Economics and engaged in political debate. He seemed destined to become a major public intellectual figure. However, in 1897 his father and mother visited him and there was a major quarrel with his father who died shortly after. Weber suffered a nervous breakdown and was unable to work for six years. He travelled, underwent psychiatric treatment and in 1903 his intellectual powers suddenly returned. He became an editor of Germany's leading social science journal and delivered a paper on the social structure of Germany at a conference in St. Louis. He then travelled extensively in America and this left a profound impression which contributed to his work on capitalism.

Weber returned to Heidelberg and resumed his writing career. His output was prolific. By 1905 he had published **The Methodology of the Social Sciences** and **The Protestant Ethic**. His home became a centre for an astonishing circle of intellectuals, including Karl Jaspers, Ernst Bloch and Georg Lukacs. Weber resumed his political activity and when the First World War broke out he volunteered and was put in charge of commissioning and running nine military hospitals in the Heidelberg area. He resigned this position in 1915 and thereafter became disillusioned with the progress and management of the war so much so that he was considered close to the "enemies of the fatherland." When the navy mutinied at Kiel in 1918 initiating the German revolution his reaction was negative, but later he called for the emergence of a full liberal polity.

Weber resumed lecturing in 1918 at Vienna University and later began lecturing at Munich University. He was also active politically, acting as an adviser to the Versailles Peace Conference, taking part in writing a new German constitution and addressing meetings where he called for a rational democratic orientation. He was even considered for the position as President of the Republic. He also published an enormous body of work including writing on the sociology of religion and his magnum opus, **Economy and Society**, although this was not published until after his death.

In June 1920 Weber developed a high fever, which at first was thought to be flu, but was in fact pneumonia. By the time the correct diagnosis had been made it was too late and Weber died on 14 June 1920.

Weber's life was characterised by high moral principles in opposition to the pragmatism of his father. He was both a nationalist and an upholder of justice and humanity. This led to what were perceived as inconsistencies. For example, he advocated shooting any Polish official who set foot in post-war Danzig and yet ended a long friendship when he discovered that Germans were not allowed to visit French prisoners of war. He denounced the German

revolution as a "bloody carnival" and this meant that the Social Democrats never truly trusted him. His scholarly work was an extraordinary contribution to Sociology.

## **WEBER'S IDEAS**

Max Weber was the first sociologist to advocate a social action approach. Symbolic interactionists try to explain human behaviour and human society by examining the ways in which people interpret the actions of others, develop a self-concept or self-image, and act in terms of meanings. Ethnomethodology moves even further from a structural approach by denying the existence of a social structure as such. They see the social world as consisting of the definitions and categorizations of members of society. The job of the sociologist, in their view, is to interpret, describe and understand the subjective reality.

Weber's major theoretical position attempted to bring together the idea of value in the study of culture with the objective approach of the natural scientist. A problem that attracts a scholar and the level of explanation that the scholar attempts Weber argues depends on the values and interests of the scholar. The choice of problems is always value relevant. There is no absolutely 'objective scientific' analysis of culture independent of special and 'one-sided' viewpoints. What is considered "worthy to be known" depends upon the perspective of the inquiring scholar. There is no impossible separation between the procedures of the natural and the social scientist although they differ in their cognitive intentions and explanatory projects.

When the objection is raised that rational knowledge of causal sequences may be reached in the world of nature, but that the human world can't be explained rationally because it is unpredictable and irrational Weber has an interesting argument. Our knowledge of nature must always be from the outside. We can only observe external courses of events and record their uniformities. However with human action, we can do more than write protocols of recurrent sequences of events. We can attempt to perceive motives by interpreting people's actions and words. We can understand human action by uncovering subjective meanings that people give to their own behaviour and to the behaviour of others. Weber's definition of sociology is that it is a science which aims at the interpretative understanding of social behavior in order to gain an explanation of its causes, its course and its effects. To understand the subjective meaning of an activity Weber argues we must empathize and relive the experience to be analyzed. Any interpretative explanation must become a causal explanation if it is to reach the dignity of a scientific proposition. Understanding and causal explanation work together rather than oppose each other in the social sciences. Intuitions of meaning can be transformed into valid knowledge only if they can be fitted into theoretical structures that aim at a causal explanation.

Against the objection that this manner of interpretation is subject to the danger of contamination from the values held by the scientific investigator, Weber argued that interpretations can be submitted to the test of evidence. This must be distinguished from the fact that the choice of subject matter stems from the investigator's value orientation, which may be the case with the natural scientist as well.

## **SOCIAL ACTION**

There are four major types of social action in Weber's sociology.

- **People can engage in purposeful or goal-oriented rational action.**  
Purposeful rationality where both goal and means are rationally chosen can be exemplified by the engineer who designs and constructs a car by the most efficient techniques of relating means to ends, combining fuel economy with an aesthetic look at the car.

- **People's rational action can be value-oriented.**  
Value-oriented rationality means that people work for a real goal, which need not be rational, for example, religious behaviour which is practised in a rational way as with young couples deciding not have intimate relations before they marry, self-denial to achieve holiness.
- **People can act from emotional or affective motivations.**  
Affective action emerges from the emotional state of the actor rather than from the rational consideration of methods and objectives. An example would be the enthusiasm of the congregation in the services of the Baptist church in the USA when a member declares his or her faith before the congregation.
- **People can engage in traditional action.**  
Traditional action is guided by customary habits of thought. For example, the behavior of members of an Orthodox Jewish congregation or devout Sunni Muslims might serve as examples of such action.

## AUTHORITY

Weber distinguished three main ways of claiming legitimacy.

- **Rational-legal authority** may be based on rational grounds and based on impersonal rules that have been legally enacted or contractually established. This characterizes the hierarchical relations in modern society. Anglophone societies, such as those in Britain, the USA, Australia and other English-speaking countries exemplify rational-legal authority in political, economic and educational structures.
- **Traditional authority** predominates in pre-modern societies and is based on belief in the sanctity of tradition. It is not codified in impersonal rules but inheres in particular persons who may either inherit it or be invested with it by a higher authority. Institutions such as the British monarchy and the structure of religious denominations in Britain and America illustrate what remains of traditional authority in these countries. The ideology of political parties, such as the British Conservative party and the American Republican party is based partly on an appeal to "traditional values. "
- **Charismatic authority** rests on the appeal of leaders who claim allegiance because of their extraordinary virtuosity whether ethical, heroic or religious. Charisma is more evident in outstanding individuals in popular culture such as entertainment or sport. An examination of the use of the word "legend" is an example of charisma attaching itself to entertainers such as John Lennon, Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin and Amy Winehouse. Charisma is more evident in American politics and religion than in Britain partly because of structural differences such as the election of the President which encourages charismatic behaviour and occasionally leads to the election of charismatic leaders such as Presidents Reagan and Obama.

Weber, unlike political theorists, regards authority as a characteristic of the relationship between leaders and followers rather than belonging to the leader alone. His idea of charisma is not rigorous but it is important as Weber advances the idea that leaders derives their role from the belief their followers have their mission.

## CLASS AND STATUS

Weber's idea of class was similar to that of Karl Marx when he defined as a class a category of people who  
(1) have in common a specific causal component of their life chances in so far as

(2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and

(3) it is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor market.

Like Marx, he asserted that class position does not necessarily lead to class-determined economic or political action. He argued that communal class action will emerge only if and when the "connections between the causes and the consequences of the 'class situation'" become transparent." Weber also introduced an extra structural category, that of **status group**.

Classification of people into such groups is based on their consumption patterns rather than on their place in the market or in the process of production. Status groups are communities, which are held together by notions of proper life-styles and by the social esteem and honour given to them by others. Dependent on this are expectations of restrictions on social intercourse with those not belonging to the circle and an assumption of social distance toward inferiors. Once more Weber's sociological notion of a social category is dependent on the definition that others give to social relationships. A status group can exist only to the extent that others give its members prestige or lack of prestige to exclude them from other social actors and creates a social distance between "them" and "us."

There are, as you might expect, correlations between standing in the class and in the status order. In a capitalist society the economically ascendant class gains high status. Analyses following Weber's ideas of American politics have shown that political behaviour can be influenced by men who are fearful of losing their status or who desire a status they think is their right.

For Weber every society is divided into groups and strata with distinctive life-styles and views of the world, as well as classes. Status as well as class groups may conflict although usually their members may accept fairly stable patterns of subordination and superordination.

With this twofold classification of social stratification Weber lays the groundwork for an understanding of pluralistic forms of social conflict in modern society and helps to explain why these societies are rarely polarized into opposing "haves" and the "have-nots." This helps explain why Marx's exclusively class-centered scheme failed to predict the dynamics of modern pluralistic societies.

In regard to the analysis of power in society, Weber again introduces a pluralistic notion. Weber agreed to a certain extent with Marx that quite often, especially in the modern capitalist world, economic power is the predominant form. However, he objects that "the emergence of economic power may be the consequence of power existing on other grounds." For example, men who are able to command large-scale bureaucratic organizations may exercise a great deal of economic power even though they are only salaried employees.

By power Weber understands the opportunity of people "to realize their own will in communal action, even against the resistance of others." He shows that the context out of which power can be exercised may vary considerably according to social, historical and structural circumstances. Consequently, where power is located is for Weber an empirical question which cannot be determined by Marx's dogmatic emphasis on one specific source. Moreover, Weber argues, people do not only strive for power to enrich themselves. "Power, including economic power, may be valued 'for its own sake.' Very frequently the striving for power is also conditioned by the social status it entails."

## BUREAUCRACY

Bureaucracy in contemporary ordinary language has negative connotations of obstructiveness, needless paperwork and unproductive officials. Yet for Weber bureaucracy was a key concept in describing modern society. His interest in the nature of power and authority, as well as his preoccupation with modern trends of rationalization, led him to investigate the operation of modern large-scale enterprises in the politics, administration and economics. Bureaucratic coordination of activities, he claimed, is the distinctive mark of the modern era. Bureaucracies are organized according to rational principles. Offices are ranked in a hierarchical order and their operations have impersonal rules. Officials are governed by the methodical allocation of areas of jurisdiction and defined spheres of duty. Appointments are made according to specialized qualifications. This bureaucratic coordination of the actions of large numbers of people has become the dominant structural feature of modern forms of organization. Only through this organizational device has large-scale planning, both for the modern state and the modern economy, become possible. Only through it can heads of state mobilize and centralize resources of political power. Bureaucratic organization is for Weber the privileged instrumentality that has shaped modern political states, the modern economies and the modern technologies. Bureaucratic types of organization are technically superior to all other forms of administration.

Yet Weber was also aware of the failings of bureaucracy. Its major advantage, calculating results, also makes it unsuitable and obstructive in resolving individual cases. Modern rationalized and bureaucratized systems of law have become unable to deal with individual circumstances for which earlier types of justice were well suited. „The modern judge," according to, "is a vending machine into which pleadings are inserted together with a fee and which then ejects a judgment together with the reasons mechanically derived from the Code."

Weber argued that the bureaucratization of the modern world has led to its depersonalization:

the more fully realized the more bureaucracy "depersonalizes" itself, i.e., the more completely it succeeds in achieving the exclusion of love, hatred, and every purely personal, especially irrational and incalculable, feeling from the execution of official tasks. In the place of the old-type ruler who is moved by sympathy, favor, grace, and gratitude, modern culture requires for its sustaining external apparatus the emotionally detached, and hence rigorously professional expert."

Further bureaucratization and rationalization seemed to Weber an almost inescapable fate.

Imagine the consequences of that comprehensive bureaucratization and rationalization which already today we see approaching. Already now . . . in all economic enterprises run on modern lines, rational calculation is manifest at every stage. By it, the performance of each individual worker is mathematically measured, each man becomes a little cog in the machine and, aware of this, his one preoccupation is whether he can become a bigger cog. . . . It is apparent today we are proceeding towards an evolution which resembles the ancient kingdom of Egypt in every detail, except that it is built on other foundations, on technically more perfect, more rationalized, and therefore much more mechanized foundations. The problem which besets us now is not ,how can this evolution be changed? for that is impossible, but what will come of it?

Weber's views about the inescapable rationalization and bureaucratization of the world have obvious similarities to Marx's notion of alienation. Both agree that modern methods of organization have increased the effectiveness and efficiency of production and organization exponentially and have allowed an unprecedented domination of man over the world of

nature. They also agree that the new world of rationalized efficiency has turned into a monster that threatens to dehumanize its creators. But Weber disagrees with Marx, who sees alienation as only a transitional stage on the road to man's true emancipation. Weber does not believe in the future leap from the realm of necessity into the world of freedom. Even though he would permit himself upon occasion the hope that some charismatic leader might arise to deliver mankind from the curse of its own creation, he thought it more probable that the future would be an "iron cage" rather than a Garden of Eden.

Finally, although Weber agreed with Marx's insight that capitalist industrial organization led to the expropriation of the worker from the means of production he did not agree that the worker would inevitably appropriate the property of the capitalists and the means of production. Weber felt that such expropriation from the means of work was an inescapable result of any system of rationalized and centrally coordinated production, rather than being a consequence of capitalism as such. Such expropriation would characterize a socialist system of production just as much as it would the capitalist form. Moreover, Weber argued, it is possible that the expropriation of the workers from the means of production was only a special case of a more general phenomenon in modern society where scientists are expropriated from the means of research, administrators from the means of administration and warriors from the means of violence. He further contended that in all relevant spheres of modern society men could no longer engage in socially significant action unless they joined a large-scale organization in which they were allocated specific tasks and to which they were admitted only upon condition they sacrificed their personal desires and predilections to the impersonal goals and procedures that governed the whole.

After Durkheim and Weber sociology became a major discipline including studies into all aspects of social life. There were important theoretical contributions from Georg Simmel (1858 – 1918) who focused on human interactions particularly the study of conflict and its social function. After the Second World War the theoretical approach of Sociology was dominated by structural-functionalist Action Theory advocated by Talcott Parsons (1902 - 1979). Current approaches owe much to Anthony Giddens a British sociologist whose work extends to philosophy, politics and psychology.

### **ANTHONY GIDDENS, (1938 - )**

Anthony Giddens was born and raised in London and grew up in a lower-middle-class family being the first member of his family to go to university. Giddens received his undergraduate academic degree in sociology and psychology at the University of Hull in 1959, followed by a master's degree at the London School of Economics. He later gained a PhD at King's College, Cambridge. He has spent his working life in the academic world. He is cofounder of Polity Press (1985). From 1997 to 2003, he was director of the London School of Economics and a member of the Advisory Council of the Institute for Public Policy Research. He was also an adviser to Tony Blair. It was Giddens whose "**third way**" political approach was Tony Blair's guiding political idea.

### **REDEFINING SOCIOLOGY**

Much of Giddens' early writings commented on a wide range of schools and traditions. Giddens took a position against the then-dominant structural functionalism of Talcott Parsons as well as criticizing evolutionism and historical materialism. He examined the work of Weber, Durkheim and Marx, arguing that despite their different approaches each was concerned with the link between capitalism and social life. Giddens emphasized the social constructs of power, modernity and institutions, defining sociology as "**the study of social institutions brought into being by the industrial transformation of the past two or three centuries.**"

In **New Rules of Sociological Method** (1976) Giddens attempted to explain „how sociology should be done“ and addressed a long-standing divide between those theorists who engage in 'macro level' studies of social life and those who concentrate on the 'micro level', that is what everyday life means to individuals. In his book he observed that the functionalist approach created by Durkheim treated society as a reality which is not reducible to individuals. He rejected Durkheim's attempt to predict how societies operate, ignoring the meanings perceived by individuals. Giddens noted:

Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, insofar as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do.

Giddens contrasted Durkheim with Weber's interpretative approach which was concerned with understanding agency and the motivation of an individual. He is closer to Weber than Durkheim, but ultimately he rejects both of those approaches claiming that society is not a collective reality, but neither should the individual be treated as the central unit of analysis.

As his thinking matured Giddens developed a theory of **structuration**. This holds that social life is more than random individual acts, but is not merely determined by social forces. He suggests that human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents which reproduces the structure. It means that there is a social structure comprised of traditions, institutions, moral codes and established ways of doing things, but it also means that these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them or reproduce them differently.

## **SOCIAL ORDER AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION**

If individuals find it difficult to act in any way that they like, what is the nature of those invisible social forces which provide resistance? Giddens finds an answer by making an analogy with language.

Although language only exists in those instances where we speak or write it, people react strongly against those who disregard its rules and conventions. In a similar way, the 'rules' of social order may only be 'in our heads' , but nevertheless, people can be shocked when seemingly minor social expectations are not adhered to. People's everyday actions reinforce and reproduce expectations and these make up the 'social forces' and 'social structures' that sociologists explore. Giddens observes, „Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do“

## **LIFESTYLE**

In the post-traditional era, since social roles are no longer imposed on us by society, we have to choose a 'lifestyle' although the options are not, of course, unlimited. **'Lifestyle choices'** may sound like a journalistic phrase for people with money, but Giddens claims that everyone in modern society has to select a lifestyle. Different groups will have different opportunities, but 'lifestyle' is not only about prestigious jobs and conspicuous consumption. It applies to wider choices, behaviours and attitudes and beliefs.

The choices which we make in modern society may be affected by tradition on the one hand and a sense of relative freedom on the other. Everyday choices about what to eat, what to wear, who to socialize with, are all decisions which identify us as one kind of person and not another. Giddens observes:

The more post-traditional the settings in which an individual moves, the more lifestyle concerns the very core of self-identity, its making and remaking.

In this respect the importance of the media in disseminating many modern lifestyles should be obvious. The range of lifestyles offered by the media may be limited and idealistic, but at the same time it is usually broader than those we would expect to just encounter in everyday life. So the media in modernity offers possibilities and celebrates diversity, but also offers narrow interpretations of certain roles or lifestyles depending on their agenda.

## **MODERNITY AND SELF-IDENTITY**

In societies where modernity is well developed self-identity becomes an unavoidable issue. Even those who would say that they have never given any thought to questions or anxieties about their own identity will have had to make significant choices throughout their lives, from everyday questions about clothing, appearance and leisure to lifetime decisions about relationships, beliefs and occupations. In earlier societies with a social order based firmly in tradition individuals had clearly defined roles. In post-traditional societies we have to work out our roles for ourselves. As Giddens observes:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity - and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour.

The importance of these questions of identity in modern society is both a result and a cause of change at the institutional level. Giddens perceives connections between 'micro' aspects of society, for example, an individual's internal sense of self and identity and the 'macro' picture of the state, multi-national enterprises and globalization. These different levels, which once were treated quite separately by sociology, influence each other and cannot be understood in isolation.

The changes in personal relationships of the last sixty years with much greater levels of divorce and separation as people move from one relationship to another, the increased openness about sexuality and more visible sexual diversity are an example. These changes cannot be understood by assuming separate movements at the level of social institutions and the state on the one the one hand and the expansion of individual consciousness on the other. Macro and micro phenomena occur through complex interactions between individuals, communities and large institutions. In the case of personal relationships, the effects of greater democracy, increased education, the liberal ideology underlying capitalism, greater freedom in the media have all combined to change both large institutions and the choices available to individuals. The task of sociology is to understand the processes which underlie these interactions.

In this respect the mass media is has influenced individual perceptions of relationships. In serious drama or celebrity gossip the need for 'good stories' always supports an emphasis on change in relationships. Since almost nobody in a television soap opera remains happily married for a lifetime we receive the message that monogamous heterosexual stability is a minority 'ideal', which few can expect to achieve. We are encouraged to reflect on our relationships in cultural products such as magazines and self-help books and in movies, comedy and drama. The news and factual media tell us about the findings of lifestyle research and actual social changes in family life. This knowledge is then 'reappropriated' by ordinary people, often lending support to non-traditional models of living. Information and ideas from the media do not merely reflect the social world, then, but contribute to its shape, and are central to modern self-reflection.

## MAIN POINTS

- **STRUCTURALISM**

Structural theory analyses the way society fits together. It regards society as a system of relationships that create the society in which we live. It is this structure that determines our lives and characters. Structured sets of social relationships lie below the appearance of the free individual' of western individualism. Structuralism focuses on the particular set of structural laws that apply in a society.

- **SOCIAL ACTION THEORY**

Social Action theory, interpretive sociology or micro sociology does not see human behaviour as being largely determined by society. It sees society as being the product of human activity. It stresses the meaningfulness of human behaviour, denying that it is primarily determined by the structure of society.

- **MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY**

Mechanical solidarity prevails where individual differences are minimized and the members of society are much alike in their devotion to common objectives.

- **ORGANIC SOLIDARITY**

Organic solidarity develops out of differences, rather than likenesses, between individuals. It is a product of the division of labour. With increasing elaboration of functions in a society there are a greater number of differences between its members.

- **VALUE RELEVANT**

There is no absolutely ,objective'scientific analysis of culture independent of special and 'one-sided' viewpoints. What is considered "worthy to be known" depends upon the perspective of the inquiring scholar. There is no impossible separation between the procedures of the natural and the social scientist although they differ in their cognitive intentions and explanatory projects.

- **SOCIAL ACTION**

There are four major types of social action in Weber's sociology.

- goal-oriented rational action.
- value-oriented.
- affectively motivated.
- traditional action.

## AUTHORITY

- Rational-legal authority
- Traditional authority
- Charismatic authority

- **CLASS AND STATUS**

A category for people who (1) have in common a specific causal component of their life chances in so far as (2) this component is represented exclusively by economic interests in the possession of goods and opportunities for income, and (3) it is represented under the conditions of the commodity or labor market.

- **BUREAUCRACY**

Under Max Weber's theory bureaucracy coordinates of the activities of modern industrialized societies. He claimed bureaucracy is the distinctive mark of the modern era. It is organized according to rational principles with offices ranked in a hierarchical

order and operations having impersonal rules. Officials are governed by the methodical allocation of areas of jurisdiction and defined spheres of duty.

The bureaucratic coordination of the actions of large numbers of people has become the dominant structural feature of modern forms of organization. Only through this organizational device has large-scale planning, both for the modern state and the modern economy, become possible. Only through it can heads of state mobilize and centralize resources of political power.

- **THEORY OF STRUCTURATION**

This was developed by Giddens and holds that social life is more than random individual acts, but is not only determined by social forces. Human agency and social structure are in a relationship with each other and it is the repetition of the acts of individual agents which reproduces the structure. So there is a social structure made up of traditions, institutions, moral codes and established ways of doing things. However, these can be changed when people start to ignore them, replace them or reproduce them differently.

- **LIFESTYLE**

Everyone in modern society has to choose a lifestyle. Different groups will have different opportunities, but lifestyle is not only about prestigious jobs and conspicuous consumption. It applies to a wider range of choices, behaviours and attitudes and beliefs.

## **SEMINAR EXERCISES**

- Discuss with a partner the groups where you feel the greatest solidarity? Use your family, seminar group, workplace as possible examples.
- What institutions in Britain or America are likely to have good solidarity? Political parties, government offices, religious groups, secondary school classes, clubs for hobbies, the army?
- Think of some institutions in Britain and America such as the American presidency, the monarchy, the church, education, the National Health Service, pop groups, soap operas, the financial industry. What kind of authority do these different institutions have, Traditional, rational-legal, charismatic?
- What status groups do you belong to? What are the high status groups in Britain and America?
- Recall a positive and a negative experience of your own or that of someone you know with bureaucracy? What common features of bureaucracy are in our ordinary everyday lives? Which country in your opinion and why has got more bureaucracy, Britain or America.
- What social structures are changing in Slovakia? Can you think of changes in social structure in Britain or America?
- Write a short profile of your lifestyle. Are there features of life in Britain or America which are noticeably different?

## READING

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See also:

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