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In addition to the chapters in this book, you can go to the companion website [www.palgravehighered.com/stones](http://www.palgravehighered.com/stones) to see five chapters from the 1st and 2nd editions of *Key Sociological Thinkers*:

**Theodor Adorno**

*Maggie O'Neill*

**Herbert Blumer**

*Ken Plummer*

**Simone de Beauvoir**

*Mary Evans*

**Sigmund Freud**

*Ian Craib*

**David Lockwood**

*Nicos Mouzelis*

# INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPING THEORETICAL SKILLS BY ENGAGING WITH *KEY SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS*

## The Formidable Challenges Facing Sociological Thought

Who wouldn't find it difficult not to be impressed by the remarkable depths of knowledge human beings have reached in manifold areas of the natural sciences, and by the conversion of this understanding into astonishing practical achievements? From the feats of architecture and civil engineering, through those of space exploration and of neuroscience, to the knowledge and fruits of the human genome project, to name just a few, human achievements are truly astounding. How is it, then, that we fall so short in even the modest aim of constructing societies where people can live together in relative harmony, safe from violence or civil war or threats from outside forces, with basic needs satisfied, with limited inequality, and with respect for each other's values and ways of life? The contrast between human achievements in the two different fields of human endeavour is extreme.

The causes of this acute disparity derive partly from the challenges thrown up by the character of social relations themselves, which differ significantly from the character of the entities and relations studied by the physical and natural sciences. For at the heart of all societies we find configurations of social power. The individuals and groups who exercise that power have the capacity to reflect on just how they wield it, for good and, often, for ill. The capacity of the powerful to reflect, and therefore to dodge, resist, and strategize, makes them difficult to control. Their ability to reflect, plan, and decide to behave differently means that it is unwise to look for those universal laws of behaviour – where the same prior conditions always lead to the same consequences – that have been the bedrock of aspects of the experimental sciences. The relatively powerless, too, can also resist, which gives them some power against those who rely on their compliance. Even as individuals they can often decide to act in ways that go against the grain, and this capacity is greatly increased when they combine into collectives. Power combined with reflection is one key reason why social life is unpredictable in its own distinctive ways.

The use of power is also closely bound up with cultural and political *norms* about when and how it is legitimate to use it. *Norms* are the expectations that societies develop regarding how people and organizations should behave. They are often backed up by formal laws and rules, but even more often they are simply embedded in cultural knowledge about right and wrong ways of behaving. These norms, which guide and set parameters for the legitimate use of power, can also be reflected upon, disputed, fought over, and altered over time. In this ongoing struggle over norms, genuinely dignified, fair-minded, moral principles about how to use power tend to vie with more cynical justifications for

its use. Those who already possess power typically use it to their advantage as they engage in struggles over norms, and they will typically seek to secure legitimacy for practices that will perpetuate the current distribution of material resources and authority. The justifications of the powerful will frequently be less than selfless.

There is a recurrent tension, therefore, between power and morals, with those seeking a more noble, just, society striving to establish corresponding norms on the level of a society's culture. In well-functioning democratic societies, underpinned by inclusive moral principles, the dominant culture attempts to make those with power accountable, through the channels of various media, in the court of public opinion. This is far from plain sailing, however, for those with power tend not to relinquish it easily, and will frequently attempt to present their self-interested actions as selfless actions carried out for the good of the whole society. The character of the moral field is consequently a field of constant contestations. Ideological persuasion can be backed up by moral reasoning, but also by other overt and covert means, both legal and illegal, depending on place, circumstance, and opportunity. This fierce battle around ideas, for the hearts and minds of populations, is not something that infuses the objects of knowledge studied by the physical and life sciences.

These aspects of the social world present sociology and other social sciences with a distinct set of challenges, and these distinctive qualities of subject matter need to be kept constantly in mind. These characteristics mean that the projects of acquiring knowledge about societies, about how they function, and then applying that knowledge in the world, present radically different challenges to those posed by investigations and applications with respect to the natural sciences. Having said this, not all of the acute disparity between the two fields of human achievement can be put down to these different characteristics. For significant weight should also be given to our failure to think imaginatively enough, deeply enough, and carefully enough, about the kinds of knowledge we should try and attain, and apply, in the realm of social life once we have acknowledged its special characteristics. Committed, creative study of the key sociological thinkers presented in this volume can go a long way to putting right this part of the equation.

Engaging straightforwardly with each thinker on their own terms, understanding the traditions they are immersed in, and the subject matters and questions that preoccupy them, is one principal feature of the comprehension required. We could label this the 'internal' reading of a key thinker's work. But another, complementary, dimension involves engaging with each thinker from what we can call a 'meta-theoretical' perspective, as it is this that will allow the reader to begin *to think across* thinkers, and to considerably enhance their own ability to theorize. By meta-theoretical, in this context, I mean the ability to step back from each individual thinker, and to think in a focused way about what that theorist is doing when they theorize. In doing this, readers can soon see that what each one of the thinkers does has a lot in common with what the others do. To promote the habit or 'thinking across' the work of different thinkers, bold font is used in each key thinker chapter the first time an author introduces the name of another key thinker whose work has some kind of connection or resonance with the main subject of the chapter. Bold font is also used – more liberally – in this introduction, to highlight

points made about particular key thinkers, facilitating the ability to follow the connections between the preoccupations and insights of thinkers established in the weave of the narrative. The exposition will actively seek to convey areas of overlap between theorists, and key points at which their insights could be combined. The conceptual tools provided will also enable readers to theorize those aspects of society that they themselves believe are particularly important. Before this, however, the next section will provide some orientation on the format that all authors were asked to follow in writing their chapters, and on the reasoning behind the format. This will include a discussion of how the format will facilitate readers' ability to read and reflect 'across' different thinkers.

Cultivating an ability to learn from the two ways of approaching *Key Sociological Thinkers* just mentioned – the internal and the meta-theoretical readings – will enable the reader to develop clear-sighted perspectives on key concerns of sociological theory that are vital for social progress. It is necessary to harness commitment, care, and social conscience to a capacity to ground these responsibly in an understanding of real possibilities, constraints, and consequences. This will create a more adequate capacity to think about, and to make a case about: (i) causation within societies, both in general and in particular circumstances; (ii) the character of socio-structural fields, which will always constrain some actions and facilitate others; and (iii) the actual and potential roles of individual and collective actors in contributing to social change. Engaging seriously with *Key Sociological Thinkers* will also indicate the attentive, composed character of the reflections required, as a necessary if not sufficient condition, to build judicious, principled, and inclusive social and political communities.

## The Life of *Key Sociological Thinkers*, and the Common Design of the Chapters

This is the third edition of *Key Sociological Thinkers*, with the first edition having come out in 1998, and the second published in 2008. If the current volume stays on the shelves and on course reading lists as long as the first two editions, then the book will have been part of the sociological landscape for more than a quarter of a century, which is a singular achievement for all involved. The longevity of the volume owes an enormous debt to the quality of the individual chapters, and I will say more in a moment about the distinction of the authors of the chapters. It also owes much to the easily manageable length of the chapters, each of which provides a high-level but accessible overview of a thinker's work, with references and a helpful 'Further Reading' section at the end of chapters inviting readers to go further into aspects of a thinker's work they have found particularly interesting or inspiring. And, finally, the success of the book is also, I hope, due to the fact that a significant effort has been made with each successive edition not only to integrate the individually authored chapters into a coherent whole, but also to refresh and renew the collection.

The renewal of the collection has included the updating of existing chapters, the introduction of new thinkers, and the addition of new features, such as the eight 'additional

thinker' glossary boxes (see the Contents page) I have written for the current volume, encompassing thirteen thinkers from sociology and other disciplines whose work complements, and gives important further context to, the twenty-four key sociological thinkers whose work is the subject of the core chapters. There are four entirely new key thinkers included in the new edition, the first two of which, coincidentally, are typically known by their initials rather than their given names: **G.H. Mead**; **W.E.B. Du Bois**; **Bruno Latour**; and **Jeffrey C. Alexander**. For reasons to do with the inescapable economics of publishing, the number of chapters in this third edition has only expanded to twenty-four, compared with the twenty-three in the previous edition. Difficult judgments have had to be made about which chapters from earlier editions were to be left out to make space for the new chapters. These are the most difficult decisions to make in editing a book such as this, and I'm never entirely happy with the compromises we come up with, although, of course, I take final responsibility for them. The excellent chapters on **Theodor Adorno** and on **David Lockwood**, which were both in the second edition, do not appear in the current volume, although elements of Lockwood's work are clearly apparent in the thinker box on the work of the contemporary Greek theorist **Nicos Mouzelis**. Both Adorno and Lockwood are clearly major thinkers, and there is no good intellectual reason for leaving them out, but a pragmatic, pedagogic rationale came from the feedback to the publishers from course leaders that these thinkers were not often included in sociological theory units, and so the chapters were not used to the same extent that others were. These chapters, together with the chapters on **Sigmund Freud** and **Simone de Beauvoir** from the first edition have been made available on the Palgrave website ([www.palgravehigher.com/stones](http://www.palgravehigher.com/stones)). Also on the website is the chapter on **Herbert Blumer** from the second edition. The decision to leave out the Blumer chapter was an easier one, as the author of this chapter, Ken Plummer, himself suggested that a chapter on G.H. Mead would be an interesting change for the current edition.

Altogether, nine of the twenty-four key thinker chapters in this third edition are entirely new. In addition to the four new thinkers, five new authors were commissioned to write new chapters on existing thinkers. These are Edward Tiryakian's chapter on **Émile Durkheim**, Piotr Sztompka's chapter on **Robert K. Merton**, Susie Scott's on **Erving Goffman**, Derek Robbins's on **Pierre Bourdieu**, and Craig Browne's on **Anthony Giddens**. The search for new authors is in part a consequence of the longevity of the book, paralleling the passage of time in the lives of its authors, and more than a small measure of poignancy is attached to this aspect of the changing of the guard. The project has been extremely lucky to be able to recruit outstanding authors for all nine of the new chapters (see Notes on Contributors).

Indeed, all the contributing authors to the volume are significant thinkers in their own right. Each also has a close knowledge of their subject, being distinguished for having written important work exclusively on their thinker, or in the area where this thinker is particularly prominent. Most are also counted as among the most innovative and influential sociological theorists of their generation, and those who are not yet thought of in this way are well on the way to being so. The authors were, of course, approached for these reasons, but also because of a conscious editorial decision to enlist only authors who

have a particular enthusiasm for their key thinker, in the hope that their excitement and passion would be conveyed to the reader. Conversely, it was hoped to avoid the problem of many single-authored textbooks, where the author is at best lukewarm and at worst dismissive of thinkers with whom she or he differs. Too much is lost when this happens. I wanted the vibrancy and loyalty that their thinker's way of seeing the world brings out in each author to be conveyed to readers, so allowing the reader to run with the insights and the enthusiasm as far as possible, and for as long as possible, until that fertile, productive point is reached at which they themselves begin to sense the possible obstacles and limitations of that perspective, notwithstanding its continuing strengths.

This reasoning overlaps with the rationale for the first section of the common format of the key thinker chapters, which is headed *Driving Impulses*. This section asks the author to reflect upon the preoccupations of their thinker, and on the influences that motivated them to devote so much time and energy attempting to make some sense of those preoccupations. The influences referred to are both intellectual influences and those from the social, political, and cultural milieu in which they found themselves. This opening section is followed by the *Key Issues* section at the heart of every chapter, in which authors are asked to choose four or five issues that are central to the work of their thinker. The vast majority of key issues fall into one or other of three categories: *philosophical*, *methodological*, or *substantive*. I will clarify these terms below. The restriction to five *key issues* gives authors licence not to attempt an exhaustive coverage of topics in such a short space. They can focus on what they believe to be some of the most important or most interesting aspects of a key thinker's writings. It also makes the coverage manageable for readers being introduced to this body of work for the first time.

I will devote a large portion of this introduction to reflections on the three different types of key issue – *philosophical*, *methodological*, and *substantive* – with most of the emphasis, for reasons of space, on the *philosophical* and the *substantive*. I will explain how **an awareness of what each type is, and an ability to identify which of a thinker's key issues belong to which category, are invaluable theoretical skills**. They allow an internal understanding of a thinker to be complemented by an understanding of how to use meta-theory – the ability to stand back and reflect on similarities and differences between theorists. There is usually a mixture of types of key issue in each chapter, with the majority being substantive. For the time being, let me just say that by a *substantive key issue* I mean that the key issue is capturing something fairly concrete and tangible about a particular type of society in a particular period of history.

The inevitable limitations of a single theoretical approach often only become visible in the course of trying to use a key thinker's insights to solve a particular problem one is deeply engaged with. *One solution* is often not to dispense with the favoured thinker altogether, but to combine his or her work with insights taken from another perspective. As soon as we do this, then we are in the realm of meta-theory – thinking across thinkers, combining their insights, and, in the process, becoming clearer as to exactly what it is that each thinker contributes to understanding. *An alternative solution* is to try and combine the favoured thinker's insights, not with the ideas of another key thinker but with one's own theoretical insights. This, of course, presupposes that one has the skills and

the confidence to do this, and *Key Sociological Thinkers* will help to develop these. Both solutions, of course, can be combined into one, drawing on parts of both: drawing on an additional thinker and on one's own insights. There are two kinds of intellectual virtue at work whatever the solution, corresponding to the two main features of *Key Sociological Thinkers*. There is the initial virtue in understanding the internal coherence of the initial thinker's perspective, the particular social histories and intellectual traditions they are steeped in, and which they bring together in their work, guided by their own particular preoccupations. And then there is the further virtue, brought in at the point when one stretches beyond the work of just one thinker, of learning how to combine theories, how to build one's own creative synthesis, in order to address a particular social problem or issue which seems to demand a novel angle, a novel approach. It will become apparent in the course of reading the book that all key thinkers have themselves produced perspectives that are creative hybrids of the insights of other thinkers and other traditions. In doing so, each was animated by issues, puzzles, and problems that seemed to require the synthesis they came up with.

In the Seeing Things Differently section that follows the Key Issues topics, authors provide a graphic sense of how their thinker has managed to illuminate the way that the authors look at a social phenomenon, sometimes shocking them into awareness of something they had previously taken for granted or simply not noticed. The authors convey this by providing a real world example or illustration of the phenomenon they now see differently. Their aim is to convey the magic that theory has wrought in their way of seeing the social world. In doing so, they aim to make the theory that much more alive. The illustrative example might be taken from the *wider* sociological literature (that is, it is not an example from their key thinker's own work, as this could be included in the Key Issues section), or from another source such as a novel, a fiction film, a documentary, the world of politics, or from experience of everyday life. Among other things, this section allows the reader to think closely about the relations between abstract theory and empirical realities, encouraging an awareness of how the best theory moulds and shapes the sense data we take in from the world. It shows how theory can give meaning to that sense data in ways that subvert superficial, habitual apprehensions, illuminating aspects of the world in entirely new and often surprising ways.

The Legacies and Unfinished Business section of the chapters is fairly self-explanatory, asking about the continuing influence of a key thinker, and whether there are any particular aspects of their work that have proved to be incomplete or in need of further development by subsequent thinkers. It addresses such questions as: what are the major intellectual and social legacies of this thinker? Which later thinkers, and schools of thought, has the thinker influenced? Which parts of the intellectual legacy are still being investigated, still bearing fruit, or have still to be fully explored? Are there themes that have been criticized, reworked, and reformulated by later thinkers in such a way that they shed more light on the problematic that motivated the original thinker? Which later thinkers have taken up themes and issues explored by this thinker and have carried them further? In what ways, if any, have the ideas of this thinker been combined with concepts and theoretical insights derived from other theorists? And finally, the Further Reading

### EXERCISE: USING THE SEEING THINGS DIFFERENTLY SECTIONS TO DEVELOP THEORETICAL SKILLS

The headings for the Seeing Things Differently sections in the Expanded Table of Contents (xi), providing distinct titles for the topic elicited for each thinker, gives a good overview of the range of subjects covered. A useful exercise to develop theoretical skills can be undertaken in relation to this section. This can be carried out according to the following guidelines, which can be used repeatedly on different occasions to address the various Seeing Things Differently topics. The exercise can be carried out alone, individually, but for ease of exposition I will assume in what follows that the exercise is being carried out in a seminar-style meeting or a book group. Individuals can, of course, adapt the method to working on their own. Parts of the process can also be allocated to preparatory work to be carried out individually prior to the session. Readers will need to have copies of the book to access within the seminar. The first step is for a chapter on a particular thinker to be chosen as the focus for the session, preferably in advance. From this point:

- i) Readers, working on their own, should be given *ten minutes* to read through the Seeing Things Differently section for a selected thinker, and to then quickly **identify, and write down, the aspects of theory that have been drawn on by the author, including how, exactly, they have been mixed with the real world aspects of the illustrative example**. There will usually be many different possible angles to take on this, and the process of working this through will develop theoretical skills in a manner paralleling what should happen within the research process.
- ii) Readers should then be arranged into pairs and be given *five minutes* to share their answers and discuss them together. Because they have worked on their own in the first stage, they will have something of their own to bring to the discussion in pairs.
- iii) [*Optional step*] Pairs should then be grouped with other pairs, into fours. They should be given *ten minutes* to share their answers with each other, making sure that everyone is given the opportunity to speak and be listened to attentively and respectfully. This might be an opportunity for the facilitator to move pairs around the room, so they are interacting with people they do not usually engage with. Discussing in groups of four at this stage, *after* the initial pairing has already had a chance to discuss their ideas, is helpful as it is likely that pairs will have already established some confidence in their ideas. This is likely to engender a more engaged, livelier discussion. This part of the exercise also helps participants to develop the skills of articulating and presenting abstract ideas to relatively unfamiliar audiences.
- iv) Returning to a discussion in the larger group, the facilitator should encourage the various groups of four to share their reflections with everybody. That is, **their reflections on how their author mixed the key thinker's ideas with the real world aspects of the illustrative example**. This discussion can continue, time allowing, until as many aspects as possible have been covered.

The level of sophistication of these discussions will increase as the weeks go by, and as further dimensions of this Introductory chapter are engaged with. What I mean by this will be apparent by the end of the chapter. Nevertheless, these exercises are useful right from the start, without any additional preparation. The process of engaging with the exercise at an early stage will itself play a significant role in improving theoretical literacy, and will make readers more receptive to points made in the remainder of the chapter.

section, mentioned above, provides a short reading list of books and journal articles to enable the reader to take her or his interests further. For the third edition, the instructions to authors were to try and give four items from the key thinker, including two shorter pieces, and then four items from commentators on that thinker's work. These items were to be accompanied by two or three lines of useful commentary.

I also want to add something here on my recent book, *Why Current Affairs Needs Social Theory*, which was written as a contribution to public sociology. Focused on news stories and current affairs, one central idea is that social and sociological theory needs to build bridges from the details of the everyday empirical world contained in news and current affairs back into its own preoccupations. The second idea, simply reversing the emphasis, is that the language of sociology, informed by theory, needs to interweave with – become part of – the everyday language of practical social conduct. I see the book as a contribution to both these projects, and it was designed to be read alongside *Key Sociological Thinkers*, indicating the value of sociological theory to pressing concerns in the real world. Throughout *Why Current Affairs Needs Social Theory*, readers are expressly directed to chapters from *Key Sociological Thinkers* that provide further background to the ideas used in the book to illuminate particular news and current affairs stories. The latter include discussions of news accounts of Israeli settlers on the West Bank, the Rwandan genocide of 1994, the Egyptian 'revolution' in 2011, the Obama administration's immigration reform bill, the bases of Germany's current economic success, the conflict between 'red shirts' and 'yellow shirts' in Thailand, China's diplomatic relations with Burma, and scandals of mistreatment within the UK and Swedish healthcare systems.

## Philosophical and Methodological Key Issues

At the very heart of each chapter of *Key Sociological Thinkers* is the Key Issues section, in which the main preoccupations of each thinker are laid out. As noted above, authors were asked to present four or five issues central to the work of their thinker. These issues could be *philosophical*, *methodological*, or *substantive*, and the process of considering which of the Key Issue sections for each key thinker belongs in which category is an effective exercise in developing theoretical ability. For reasons of pace and clarity, I will address the first two of these categories here – the *philosophical* and the *methodological* – and will return, later, to substantive issues.

The *philosophical* issues concern two overlapping domains, and I will begin by establishing what these are, and differentiating them from each other. I will then go on to say more about each of them in turn. The first of these philosophical issues, which appear in a number of Key Issue sections, involves the key thinker's reflections on the most *general characteristics* of the social world. These are *ontological* characteristics. That is, they deal with the most basic and persistent building blocks or components of society, which it is useful to think of as being relevant to all times and places. These reflections lead to the creation of concepts that provide the provisional basic shapes and outlines of the entities, relations, and so on that make up society. I shall list these below, and discuss them further,

so it is clearer what I am referring to. For the moment, it is important to note that because these ontological components are so general – relevant to all societies in all times and places – they are typically considered and elaborated upon at an abstract level, without the substance and rich, local detail they necessarily take on in particular times and places.

As a caveat, it is worth noting that one way of making advances at the level of ontology is to discover that an element within social life that was believed to be relevant to all societies is, in fact, not so, for one reason or another. Such discoveries don't render the level of ontology otiose, but indicate its usefulness as a point of reference, as well as its provisional status, and potentially partial coverage ('partial' in the sense of 'not quite all times and all places'). Insights about ontological characteristics, ultimately, don't have to apply always and everywhere. It is more important that they are abstract generalizations that apply in many times and places, and can provide conceptual shape to empirical sense data in order to enable disciplined and constructive social thought.

The second set of philosophical issues reflected upon by the key sociological thinkers are those of *epistemology*. Pitched at a similarly abstract and general level, these are reflections on what kinds of things can ever be *known* about society and social relations and, often by implication, reflections on what kinds of things can't be known, or can be difficult to get to know. *Methodological* issues merge, sometimes imperceptibly, with issues of epistemology, and the terminology used by different writers often reflects a certain degree of uncertainty about where one ends and the other begins. Having said this, it is useful to think of issues of methodology as tending to be at the more practical end of things, to do with actually finding out those things that the thinker has come to believe, philosophically, can be known. Methodology, nevertheless, is always closely linked to philosophical concerns. When sociological thought is working well, the process of actually investigating things in the world will be informed and shaped by both aspects of the more abstract, philosophical reflections. Methodology, at this point, typically acts as a bridge between the philosophical level and the narrower technical 'methods' of data collection such as interviews, ethnography, surveys, and so on. Methodology (or, more accurately, 'conceptual methodology') brings the conceptual shapes, forms, and outlines of ontology into interaction with the level at which it is possible, or may be possible, to gather some evidence about those shapes, forms, and outlines. Epistemology will already have warned us that some things cannot be known, and to be aware that the empirical features of some social entities and relations, or aspects of them, will have to be simply inferred or assumed, with corresponding levels of uncertainty and provisionality.

### Ontology: General Characteristics across All Societies

All sociological thinkers are committed, implicitly or explicitly, to certain notions of ontology, to certain views of what the social world is like, what its chief characteristics are, and how these combine with each other. Each thinker, moreover, tends to focus their interest on certain characteristics of the social world at the expense of others – focusing more on time rather than space, the body more than ideas, individuals more than collectives, allocative power more than authoritative power, or structure more than agency.

Most thinkers, however, have interests in a number of characteristics of the social world, and they will often attempt, more or less successfully, to achieve an appropriate *balance* between time and space, structure and agency, and so on. They also often develop interesting ways of combining characteristics, avoiding overly simplistic either/or divisions. They consequently learn not only to balance the emphasis on, say, the body, with an equal emphasis on ideas, but may also *combine* the two together, as **Pierre Bourdieu** does in his concept of habitus.

One can often find a good deal of overlap between the special ontological preoccupations of different thinkers, especially when thinkers have been influenced by similar traditions. It is useful to keep an eye out for these overlaps, and to actively look for ways of combining insights from different thinkers. Let us begin to pursue this thought by looking at one of the chapters from *Key Sociological Thinkers* in this light. Jason Hughes's chapter on **Norbert Elias** shows how Elias works with a view of human individuals, human actors, that emphasizes their characteristic of *being open to the world*, rather than being tightly sealed and closed off within their separate individual shells. This openness, in turn, feeds into Elias's sense that people develop bonds between each other, interacting with each other and becoming interdependent in many different ways. This leads him to place great emphasis on the relations between people, and to start here rather than with people themselves, when considering other phenomena such as power: "Power" is very rarely simply a case of the one-way "dependence" of one party on another; it almost always refers to people's *interdependence*' (p. 166 of Chapter 9, Norbert Elias).

The emphasis Elias places on the open qualities of people, together with their embeddedness in webs of relations with others, has a great deal of overlap with the 'relational' emphasis of feminist authors such as **Nancy Chodorow** and **Carol Gilligan**. These writers note the humanizing qualities of openness and interdependence, but paint a picture of girls' personal development in which their connectedness with others becomes threatened by fierce pressures from the dominant forms of masculinity towards closed-in, independent, and autonomous forms of self. There is resonance, too, with much literature on the character of indigenous societies, in which other human and non-human animals, other dimensions of the natural world, and a palpable sense of the continuation of the past within the present, are profoundly implicated in the sense of self.<sup>1</sup>

Elias combines the prominence he gives to the conception of open individuals with an emphasis on the *processual* character of the social world, the idea that the form, shape, and content of the social world never stays still, is always in flux. In contemporary society there is certainly more rapid change in basic infrastructures, organizational and communicational forms and flows, and in accepted social conventions – what **Zygmunt Bauman** has labelled 'liquid modernity' – than in more traditional societies. However, Elias sees process as an enduring and pervasive quality of social life, such that even in relatively more static societies the social world, by its very nature, is always animated, always in motion, with people exerting energy, engaging in tasks, interacting, building, communicating, exchanging, and so on. In this, Elias's emphasis can usefully be considered alongside the ethnomethodology of **Harold Garfinkel**. This latter approach explores the indispensable active role that individuals play in the successful production of social processes, including the ability to 'do the right thing' at the right time.

Garfinkel focuses particularly on the competence and skills people employ in combining their background stocks of knowledge (phenomenological knowledge), built up over years, with the cues, demands, and exigencies of an immediate situation, in order to act competently in real time. He manages to clarify these, often tacit, 'methods' of everyday life (ethno-methods), and to reveal the complexity and sophistication that social actors bring to their interactions. Both Garfinkel and **Erving Goffman**, in their different but overlapping ways, emphasize the permeability of actors to external influences, showing how social norms influence actors through being internalized in the form of shared meanings and rules. This deep internalization of social structure by actors is also something that is emphasized by **Anthony Giddens**, whose structuration theory is greatly influenced by ethnomethodology. It is particularly useful to keep these various, agency-oriented, elements of process in mind when considering the large sweeps of historical sociology, where the angle of vision makes it tempting to believe that large social structures are somehow self-contained and self-reproducing, as if they work entirely by themselves. While it certainly is very often salutary to pull back from the detail of social life in order to see the big picture, it is necessary to keep reminding ourselves of the intricate relations and processes going on that one would only see from closer in. The large structures are, in fact, animated, moment by moment, by competent, situated social actors engaged in contingent relationships with situated others.

The 'processual and relational' view of the social world that characterizes Elias's work is, in fact, shared by many other key thinkers, and the identical phrase is picked out by Filipe Carriera da Silva to describe the ontological commitments of the influential early twentieth-century American thinker **G.H. Mead**, often thought of as the founder of symbolic interactionism. It is also there in **Bob Jessop's** 'strategic-relational' approach to state theory, which is a creative extension of developments initiated by **Louis Althusser** and **Nicos Poulantzas**. This approach, resulting from a process of thought lasting a century, is a critique of those aspects of previous Marxist ways of thinking about society as being made up of levels – of economics, politics, ideology, law, and so on – conceived in overly static terms, too heavy and opaque, and too closed off from each other. Deeper, more developed thought in the realm of ontology is used here to prise open an initially useful, but ultimately overly monolithic way of thinking about the social world.

Already, we have begun to think about, and open up, a number of the ontological features of social life. These include the relational and processual characteristics of the social world, and the related features of interdependence and power relations, as well as aspects of human nature such as the degree of openness human beings have towards each other. This last point raises the potentially fruitful counter-question of the extent to which certain facets and experiences of individuals, such as autonomy, solitude,<sup>2</sup> and separateness are also characteristics of people that one would find always and everywhere. All these aspects of ontology – what we alight on as the most basic and pervasive characteristics of social life – can be discussed, debated, and further refined, and they provide an invaluable reference point by which to strip back and analyse the various components or building blocks of any real world event or process.

In addition to those elements of ontology we've already given some attention to, many others will be encountered in the book, including those of social structures

(e.g. **Durkheim, Merton, Beck**), time, space (e.g. **Giddens**), culture (e.g. **Alexander**), discourse (e.g. **Foucault, Hall, Laclau**), values, norms (e.g. **Parsons, Garfinkel**), the self and social interaction (e.g. **Mead, Goffman, Chodorow, Hochschild**), power (e.g. **Elias, Mann**), ethics or morality (e.g. **Habermas, Sayer**), social hierarchies (e.g. **Mouzelis**) and combinations of actors, materiality and technology in 'actants' and networks (e.g. **Latour**).

### Epistemology and Methodology: Reflecting on How We Come to Know

*Epistemology* and *methodology* are concerned with what kind of knowledge we can get, and how we can go about getting it. At their most general they prompt us to constantly remind ourselves about the distinctive character of societies and social processes as compared to the objects of knowledge studied in the natural sciences. They ask us to make explicit the kinds of things we need to know in order to know about societies. What are the key characteristics of societies that we need to gain knowledge of? And in terms of methodology and method, they raise questions such as: will we be able to attain knowledge about societies that we are not members of through entirely external observations, running our eyes over things, noting the way things fit together, or don't fit together, and coming to our conclusions? Or, on the contrary, is the nature of the social world such that it is essential for the acquisition of true knowledge that we talk to insiders, building up pictures of how they see the world from their positions inside that society and culture, and at that particular point in history? Or will the answer be somewhere in-between – with some knowledge available to external observers, and some knowledge requiring access to insider voices and points of view? And does the nature of the social world mean that we can expect to find a single set of keys that will unlock the doors to knowledge about all societies, or do we believe that differences in societal histories of power, culture, and so on mean that we will need different sets of keys for the doors of different societies? Or, again, might the answer be somewhere in-between, so that we can transfer some lessons from one society to at least some other societies, while other lessons will only be relevant to just one society?

In other words, in addition to developing insights into the basic characteristics of the social world (*ontology*), many key thinkers devote a good deal of time and energy to reflections on what can be *known about* the forms, shapes, and textures taken by these characteristics in particular times and places. This is one part, and an important one, of a broader set of concerns (see pp. 261–6 of Chapter 16, Dorothy E. Smith) in which thinkers reflect on the whole set of processes by which knowledge comes to be acquired, how it comes to be validated as knowledge, and how certain kinds of knowledge are accorded the authority of 'science'. Key thinkers are also interested in why certain kinds of knowledge, at certain points in history, are accepted and taken up by those with power, and other kinds of knowledge are neglected. This latter point is a common theme in the work of theorists as different in other ways as the feminist thinker **Dorothy Smith**, and the Actor Network theorist (ANT) **Bruno Latour**, to mention just two.

Latour and the ANT tradition devote a good deal of attention to the various filtering processes by which the pursuit of certain kinds of scientific knowledge is supported or

not supported, and by which certain breakthroughs and discoveries are widely taken up or are left by the wayside. Latour is very clear that such decisions are not determined simply by something that might be thought of as 'pure', disinterested deliberation about the most intrinsically valuable knowledge to pursue and disseminate. He highlights the social interests behind such things as hierarchies of status and prestige, what is considered economically or commercially viable, and funding decisions, all of which influence what is researched and what is not. He believes it is important to look closely both at the immediate social organization of science in the laboratory and other sites, and at the ways in which social chains of association, technologies, networks, and alliances are implicated in the production and validation of knowledge. Mundane practices, collective action, contingent decisions, competition, and rhetoric are all said to play significant parts in establishing particular 'advances' in science. Latour's sceptical insistence on examining science as a partisan social practice is embedded in a French tradition of epistemology in the sciences that was also a significant influence on the work of **Althusser**, **Foucault**, and **Bourdieu**, before him. This tradition, as is brought out in Ted Benton's chapter on Althusser, was based on careful historical study of 'processes of interaction between science and the wider society', in which 'the criteria for what was to count as science changed as science itself changed through time' (p. 203 of Chapter 12, Louis Althusser).

**Dorothy Smith**, for her part, has highlighted the fact that sociology as a discipline was developed by men, and men of a particular class, who looked down on everyday life, and women's role within it, as consisting of 'only trivialities, trivialities that are being endlessly repeated in a chaotic manner' (p. 261 of Chapter 16, Dorothy Smith). Her belief is that the conceptual apparatus of sociology is closely bound up with the position of men as rulers, with their position, perspectives, and interests influencing what is and isn't relevant and significant. The result is a restricted, and overly arm's-length, framework of investigation. When it is looking at what have been thought of as women's issues, such as unpaid housework or 'mothering', it is consequently unable to grasp the ways in which different activities 'hang together', the way in which activities such as 'work, spare time, love and service are so intertwined'. With earlier roots in the work of Marxists such as Lukács and **Gramsci**, who placed great emphasis on the subjective viewpoint of the working classes, Smith's forceful, unassailable insistence that the situated viewpoint of women be taken seriously is part of a wider movement in epistemology that argues for taking seriously the standpoint or perspective of the person, or community, producing the knowledge at hand. This goes hand in hand with championing projects to create perspectives, concepts, and methodologies appropriate to seeing the world from the standpoint of those who have traditionally been placed in subaltern positions. Knowledge, this position insists, needs to be produced from feminist standpoints, black feminist standpoints, indigenous, post-colonial, LGBTQI, multifaith, standpoints, and so on, in order to genuinely open up the possibilities of a pluralistic, democratic, and just apprehension of the social world.

There is, in fact, a creative tension within sociological thought *between* the need to be scrupulous about facts, evidence, *and* the equal need to be aware that the sense data that undergirds these facts cannot add anything to knowledge without it being interpreted on the basis of concepts that provide it with shape and meaning. And as soon as we talk

about concepts, we talk about the standpoints, situated perspectives, and ways of seeing the world that gave rise to those concepts. This is all the more so, as we shall see below, as we move from ontological to substantive concepts. Ways of seeing the world are usually shared to a great extent by individuals sharing similar social locations and experiences, and by communities of various kinds. It is essential to acknowledge and appreciate the variety of social standpoints, and also the often closely connected range of intellectual standpoints, ranging from **Marxist, Weberian, Parsonian**, feminist, third-way, post-structuralist, queer, and post-colonial ways of seeing the world, of conceptualizing the world – and, of course, the variants within each of these.

By now, there is a widespread acknowledgement that social influences impinge upon the production of knowledge. It is understood that the kind of knowledge produced may well be affected by: the perspective or standpoint from which it is developed; the conceptual categories through which it is framed; and the power interests and social pressures that, in turn, may have influenced the perspectives and categories deployed, and which can also have a substantial effect on what research gets carried out in the first place. Such reasons played a significant part in the rejection of any form of objective knowledge by the more extreme forms of postmodernism that pervaded academic and intellectual life in the 1990s. It is indeed a difficult balancing act to acknowledge the social roots and biases within the production of knowledge, and to still strive to make judgements about the objectivity of knowledge. However, none of the above means that there can't be objectivity about facts *from within* different perspectives. The question to ask is whether there is a 'fit' between the *concepts* provided from within a perspective and the *evidence* provided, and if there is a 'fit', to go on to ask what kind of fit it is. By asking these questions, one is asking whether the way of seeing the world offered by a particular thinker, tradition, or individual can be backed up, on its own terms, by the best evidence we can take from the world as it is. None of this prevents subsequent dialogue and debate *between* perspectives; it just insists that we are as clear as we can be about the degree of objectivity that can be justifiably claimed by each of the participants in the discussion.

Within the social sciences, there is still a widespread commitment to being able to judge the *quality* and *adequacy* of knowledge (which will always be produced from within a perspective) in relation to the claims made for it. One can see the political importance of being able to justify the objectivity of sociological claims regarding the existence and incidence of poverty, inequality, violence, abuse, and so on, and also, at a more complex level, claims about *the causes* of these phenomena. Accordingly, most key sociological thinkers still adhere to a notion of objectivity, of more adequate and less adequate forms of knowledge which they assess in terms of standards of critical analysis, conceptual clarity, disciplined debate, and appropriate evidence. They would also generally adhere to a view that there can be reasonable, well-grounded debate about objectivity between proponents of different standpoints and perspectives.

In the section on 'The Sociology of Science' in his chapter on **Robert K. Merton**, Piotr Sztompka outlines the latter's notion of the scientific ethos and the various 'institutional imperatives' that underpin this. At the heart of these imperatives are those principles that most key thinkers would still adhere to, and which dovetail with the points made above

about the 'fit' between concepts and evidence. The widely acknowledged institutional imperatives are: 'organized scepticism', requiring doubt, checking and rechecking, and including **Max Weber's** instruction to always look for evidence that is 'inconvenient' for a favoured argument;<sup>3</sup> 'disinterestedness', which demands 'the subordination of extrinsic interests to the intrinsic satisfaction of finding the truth' (p. 150 of Chapter 8, Robert Merton); and a commitment to those standards that can be agreed upon by a community of scholars which, in turn, sees scientific knowledge as a common good to be freely communicated, distributed, and subjected to critical analysis. For Merton, these imperatives are underpinned by a number of interlocking subsystems within the social organization of science, which include the subsystem of 'institutionalized vigilance', and also the 'communication system of science' (p. 151 of Chapter 8, Robert Merton), which is the complex mechanism of scientific publication that makes works visible, and so available to the processes of examination and vigilance.

## Substantive Key Issues: General Characteristics within Particular Types of Society or Periods of World History

The majority of the key issues covered in the chapters on the various thinkers fall into the final category, which I've brought together under the heading of *substantive* key issues. As with the philosophical issues, this also involves a type of generalization, but it is a type different from the generalizations represented in ontological categories, which are about the building blocks of virtually all types of society, anywhere and at all times. In the case of this *substantive level*, the generalizations only apply to some types of society, or types of social practice, in certain regions of the world in particular periods of history.

These generalizations about aspects of particular types of society – or aspects of particular, historically defined, practices – fall *between* the abstract categories of ontology that are relevant to all times and places, *and* the ground level of technical method and empirical evidence. As they are about particular types of society or practices, they are closer to the ground, to particular empirical worlds, than ontological concepts, but they still make general claims. Their generalizations are typically about the kinds of entities, relations, processes, power dynamics, and so on that exist within a particular kind of society, or in a designated period of history or region of the world, or both. They provide an additional, more historically concrete, fleshed-out set of insights that can be combined with the more abstract, ontological characterizations, to inform empirical investigations.

The differentiated types of society I'm referring to are sometimes distinguished in terms of a model of historical evolution, as in **Marxism**, where the key kinds of society are feudal, capitalist, or communist, or as in **Durkheimian** analysis, where the relative development of the division of labour acts as a key distinguishing feature between societies. The division into the periods of tradition, modernity, and postmodernity is another possible schema.

Another model is offered by **Parsonian** theory, which sees the evolution of societies in terms of uneven, systemic changes around a range of key functions in politics,

economics, law, and culture, overlaid by changes in the values and norms which guide the interactions between people, both inside and outside organizations, and which they draw on as they relate to each other, and assess and evaluate each other. (Parsons labelled these values and norms as ‘pattern variables’ – see the Key Issue, ‘Evolution and Modernity’, in Bob Holton’s chapter on Parsons.)

Alternatively, types of society can be differentiated and framed in historical comparative terms, as in the historical sociology of **Barrington Moore**, whose *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* distinguishes between the six agrarian societies of England, France, the United States, China, Japan, and India in terms of different configurations of aristocrats and peasants within the category of agrarian, pre-industrial societies. Similar investigations are to be found in the work of **Michael Mann** and of **Theda Skocpol**. All these types of analysis benefit from being able to take a bird’s eye view of the societies they focus upon, which allows them to map out the large, macro outlines of what they take to be the primary power centres, configurations, and dynamics within those societies. They tend to strip out the more contingent, one-off, accidental aspects of what goes on in a society, and they look for the major contours, the routine and recursive practices deeply embedded within organizations, that give a society its key dynamics and character. Individual events, manoeuvres, and sequences can then be placed within this larger frame, putting them into a broader perspective.

But the kind of substantive issue that is *most* prevalent among the Key Issues in *Key Sociological Thinkers* is the type that singles out a forceful, general aspect of social life from within just the era of a thinker’s life, the era that marked the life experience of that thinker. These are general, spatially (geographically) broad, and temporally (historically) deep structural processes, germane to a specific period, whose powerful dynamics are often not obvious to someone just observing the obvious, most visible, course of socio-historical events. However, these general structural processes play a major role in producing the socio-historical events. The general substantive concepts the key thinkers outline and develop can be thought of as clustered sets of interrelated infrastructures and practices (such as those characterizing capitalism, patriarchy, bureaucracy, democracy, industrialism) whose structural characteristics are not immediately obvious to the naked eye. The concepts link up, and make sense of, practices that are separated in time and space, and as a consequence are largely invisible to an observer of immediate socio-historical events. This is why the practices need to be conceptualized, or, to put it another way, systematically imagined.

It is striking that all of the thinkers included in the book have lived their lives, or part of their lives, in Europe, America, or the Caribbean. And all have lived in the last 200 years. Their primary preoccupations have been bound up with these times and places, and this has no doubt skewed the emphases of social thought away from the characteristics and concerns of other parts of the world, something that has been emphasized by the proponents of a ‘Southern Theory’.<sup>4</sup> Even when the Global South has found its way into sociological thought, it has overwhelmingly been from a Western perspective, from a standpoint rooted in how the world looks from Europe, North America, or, to a lesser extent, from Australasia. This imbalance is certainly a consequence of global power

structures, however refracted and mediated, and it raises profound questions about what this canon of sociological thought has neglected in terms of both philosophical and substantive issues. Broader dialogue between sociological thought from the Global South and from the Global North clearly needs to be a priority in the twenty-first century.

The following should be noted, however. Many of the general, ontological, and substantive insights developed by the thinkers in this book are highly relevant to the analysis and understanding of many aspects of societies in other parts of the world. The depth of understanding and critical purchase they can provide should not be underestimated or neglected. The substantive concepts addressing key features of modernity pointed to in sections of this introduction, below, are powerful cases in point. The substantive forces of capitalism and bureaucracy, intensified by the processes of globalization, have made deep inroads into significant parts of most societies. At the same time, ways need to be found to acknowledge and respect the specifics of all societies, with their particular histories, both domestically and in terms of their various relations with the wider world. It is instructive, here, from the thinkers who appear in this volume, to look at the work of **W.E.B. Du Bois**. His analysis derives much of its power from its emphasis on the ways that general sociological categories (philosophical and substantive) take on a very particular form in the history of the United States. The author of the chapter, Reiland Rabaka, is clear that much of Du Bois's significance lies in the broad perspective he adopts towards American society as a whole, identifying the central and distinctive position that race played within its dominant structures. He writes that what remains remarkable about Du Bois's contributions is that his sociological concern was to develop a social science specific to the special needs of the United States. He was preoccupied, Rabaka writes, with:

uniquely and unequivocally *American* social, political, and cultural issues, such as, for example: race and anti-black racism in the context of slavery, lynching, Jim Crow laws, Black Codes, segregation, and other forms of racial oppression in the United States; racial capitalism and the racial colonization of social classes in the United States; the racial colonization of gender and sexuality in the United States; the racial colonization of religion in the United States; the racial colonization of education in the United States; and, finally, the racial criminalization of blacks, among other poverty-stricken people, in the United States. (p. 105 of Chapter 5, W.E.B. Du Bois)

The point for us, here, is that in order to understand the dominant structural characteristics of American society, one needs to draw on:

- i) *general ontological concepts*, such as race, gender, sexuality, religion, crime, slavery, poverty, extra-judicial killings (all arguably relevant to all, or virtually all, societies in history, albeit with variable incidences); with
- ii) *general substantive concepts from a particular historical period*, such as capitalism, or the figuration of the trans-Atlantic slave trade; and
- iii) *substantive concepts relevant to practices in just one particular society*, and *general* in the sense that their presence could be found in many sites *within* that society.

The latter concepts would include: the characterization of the Jim Crow laws; or the specific forms of intersectionality marking society in the United States, such as that between race and capitalism, or the forms of racial colonization of gender, sexuality, and religion within that country; or of the generalized, but distinctive, forms taken by racial segregation. A key aspect of the focus on these substantive concepts is that the substantive processes will interweave with each other in a particular society. The actual course of history will be heavily influenced by how the different substantive processes combine.

The force of Du Bois's analyses comes from the interweaving of these three types of concept in his mapping out of the dominant structural characteristics of American society. There are also, of course, unique aspects within any society that are not generalizable across the sites and practices of that society, not even within a sector or sphere of that society.

The most common type of substantive theoretical insight within the Key Issues sections corresponds to category ii) in the list above. That is, *general substantive concepts from a particular historical period or sub-period*. I will try and convey more about what these theoretical concepts are (each of which can themselves usually be broken down into interlocking concepts, as with the concept of capitalism, which can be broken down further into the smaller elements that comprise it) by looking more closely at a few of these within the historical context of *three different sub-periods of modernity* within which the key thinkers were writing. These historical sub-periods of modernity roughly correspond to the three parts into which the thinkers are organized in the book's Contents, although they don't correspond with these precisely. This lack of exact fit is simply because there are also other intellectual and pragmatic reasons for the division into Parts I, II and III, including an attempt to acknowledge the periods in which the work of particular thinkers has been most influential.

Within each of the three sections that follow I will sketch out, in headline form, just some of the major social and historical processes marking each of three roughly demarcated sub-periods within modernity. The first of these runs from the middle of the nineteenth century to the early 1920s. The second stretches from the 1930s to the end of the 1980s, and the third from the 1990s to the present day. By sketching out these periods – and I lengthen the accounts as we approach current times – I simply want to convey a broad sense of the spirit and character of the different time. Many important aspects of each period will inevitably have been left out, and it is important that readers look out for these omissions and identify them, especially when they believe them to be of great weight and significance. This can be a valuable exercise in itself. The three socio-historical sketches *combine* the surface events and 'spectacles' that populate news and current affairs accounts *with deeper, more pervasive features of a particular phase of modernity*—the kinds of themes one finds in Key Issue sections. These are features that are more generalized and entrenched, and so represent those aspects of society that are hardest for any actor, individual or collective, to shift.

The socio-historical sketches will then be followed by sections that focus in a more concerted way on these *deeper, more structural themes* produced by one or more key socio-logical thinker (generally corresponding to category ii), above), focusing on a particular *substantive* Key Issues section or a Seeing Things Differently section. These *themes* go beneath the surface manifestations of the socio-historical events and processes of the period to focus on the various enduring, sedimented forces that play a powerful role in structuring and moulding the surface events. For the first period, covering the mid nineteenth century to the advent of the 1920s, I'll provide a brief indication of some ways in which **Marx**, **Weber** and **Georg Simmel** each focused on particular aspects of the socio-historical configurations, made them into major substantive *themes* to explore, and then developed theoretical insights about how their effect on modern Western societies was a general one, deeply affecting many sites, practices, and organizations, and hence affecting the character of these societies and the individuals inhabiting them. The headlines of some of the major socio-historical processes within the second period will be followed by a discussion of one theoretical theme from the work of a thinker, **Robert K. Merton**, writing in the middle of the twentieth century, in the era of solid or organized modernity. This will signpost how Merton took a general aspect of Western societies in that period and made it into a substantive theme to be theorized. Then, drawing from Piotr Sztompka's Seeing Things Differently section, I will point to how this substantive theme can be used as an effective tool to understand the generalized and continuing experiences of mothers in paid work across organized and radical modernity.

For the final period, that of radical, or liquid, modernity, dated from around the 1990s onwards, I will first present the broad theoretical parameters of the overall period before outlining some of the key headlines characterizing its socio-historical character. Finally, I will focus on some titles of substantive Key Issues and Seeing Things Differently sections taken from the final group of thinkers, indicating briefly the nature of the general substantive themes they developed to illuminate the powerful forces driving the surface socio-historical phenomena.

The point of thinkers focusing on particular substantive aspects of the configurations of modernity in these sub-periods is in order for them to reveal the primary dynamics tending to pressure actors to behave in particular ways, and often caging them in, preventing them from behaving in other ways. The dynamics serve to reveal the constraints on freedom and initiative, the ways in which the identities and selves of actors are themselves moulded in typified ways by the generalized social structures they are socialized into, and how actors are heavily incentivized by rewards and potential sanctions to reproduce the system within very proscribed limits. The themes also direct one, more optimistically, to look out for any possibilities, opportunities, and potential for strategy and policy provided by the substantive theme they deal with. By choosing to thematize particular aspects of these dynamics, key thinkers help to *explain* how things are, indicate the *constraints* on what can be, at least in the short-term, and help to point to the chinks of opportunities that are realistically available for strategies of resistance and reform within these configurations.

### EXERCISE: DEVELOPING THEORETICAL SKILLS WITH RESPECT TO SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES

The sections on *substantive* Key Issues linked to particular historical sub-periods of modernity can be used in conjunction with individual chapters to develop theoretical skills. A useful formative exercise can be carried out according to the following guidelines, which can be used repeatedly on different occasions to address different thinkers. As with the previous exercise, this exercise can be undertaken alone, individually, but for ease of exposition I will assume in what follows that the exercise is being carried out in a seminar-style meeting or a book group. Individuals can, of course, adapt the method to working on their own. Group facilitators will need to have acquainted themselves in advance with each step in the process, carefully thinking through the sequencing for the session. **It will be helpful if participants come to the session with the broad contours of the three sub-periods of modernity fresh in their minds** (pp. 21–35). Readers will need to have copies of the book to access within the meeting. The first step is for a chapter on a particular thinker to be chosen as the focus for the meeting, preferably in advance. From this point:

- i) Readers should be given *three minutes or so* to identify the Key Issues headings within a chapter on a specified key thinker that are *substantive issues*. The facilitator should then ask the group for their views on **which of the Key Issue headings are substantive ones**, and perhaps how one would categorize the other Key Issues headings in the chapter. Readers should be encouraged to jot down the headings for the substantive key issues as a point of reference.
- ii) *Ten minutes* should now be given for readers to acquaint (or re-acquaint) themselves with the relevant substantive Key Issues sections. They can jot down any salient points as memory aids for subsequent reference and discussion.
- iii) The facilitator should then give readers *three or four minutes* to **identify which of the three sub-periods of modernity the key thinker is addressing in their substantive Key Issues sections**. Readers should write down their answer to this, and then have *five minutes*, in pairs, to share their answers and to discuss their reasons for identifying the sub-period they have.
- iv) Returning to a discussion in the larger group, the facilitator should encourage pairs to share with others their reflections on **how they identified their thinker's Key Issues with a particular sub-period**.
- v) Readers should then be given *five minutes* to read or re-read, and reflect upon, the historical-sociological summary in this Introduction on the sub-period corresponding to the thinker's substantive Key Issues. The facilitator should direct group members to the relevant pages in the book.
- vi) The facilitator can then, *first*, encourage the group to have a general discussion on the most salient features of the sub-period being considered. It should be noted that the summaries become relatively more detailed as we approach the present day, but that it should be possible to add further features to those presented in every period. It should also be possible to extend and deepen reflection on all the features that are included. *Gradually*, the facilitator should move the discussion towards asking **whether, and how, the substantive Key Issue themes of the selected key thinker provides useful additional insights about the sub-period under discussion**: are the

Key Issues able to prompt reflection in such a way as to provoke deeper insights about any of the institutions, processes and events mentioned in the socio-historical summaries?

- vii) See the 'Conclusion' to this chapter for cues as to how one might extend this exercise to also include Key Issue themes of *ontology* following stage vi). Alternatively, facilitators could construct a separate set of exercises to encourage reflection and discussion solely on Key Issues of ontology and their implications for thinking about a particular socio-historical sub-period.

## Modernity from the Mid-Nineteenth Century

The thinkers covered in Part I of the book were addressing the times of mid to late nineteenth-century industrialization, and just after, or what we might call 'early industrial modernity', in Europe and the United States. Their major works were written in the period stretching roughly from the mid nineteenth century until the early 1920s. These were times of great structural change, and so of great upheaval and turmoil in people's lives. One of sociology's most significant insistences is that the character and experience of individuals is moulded to a profound degree by the social structures they inhabit. It follows that major transformations in these social structures, pulling from under their feet the customs and practices that give their life meaning, will cut at the heart of people's identity and will present them with formidable challenges as they attempt to adapt to the new conditions.

Industrialization, with its 'dark, satanic mills', was accompanied in Europe by the urbanization of waves of populations uprooted from the countryside, migrant labour enlisted to build roads and dig canals, and by extreme levels of poverty. There were severe public health problems, including very high levels of infant and child mortality, alongside early attempts to address these; world trade expanded significantly; there was the nascent, defensive rise of organized labour and overt conflict with employers and the state; massive migratory movements by the poorer, mainly rural, populations of European societies to the United States – between 1880 and 1914, 7 million immigrants arrived in the United States from Russia and Austria-Hungary;<sup>5</sup> the development of democratic institutions, and the first moves towards the universal suffrage of males; the early struggles of women for legal and political rights; there was the deeply embedded anti-black racism in the context of slavery in the United States, and the beginnings of a long struggle against this in the violent conflict of the American Civil War, from 1861 to 1865; Europe witnessed the carnage of 'The Great War' – the 1914–18 'war to end all wars'; and everywhere there was the growth of bureaucratic systems, including those affecting the exercise of political power, which was itself organized around, and within, the nation state. All these forces, developments, and events can be thought of as analytically separable aspects of social life within early modernity. One can think of each of them as representing some of the most visible aspects of the large structures – the macro structures or spheres – each marked by definable, recognizable processes, although closely intertwining and overlapping with

other spheres in co-producing the concrete messiness of actual practices. These various processes, together with all the material and human infrastructures that enabled them to take place, provided the structural grid, or the contextual field, for the lives of individuals. They were all key components of the context in which individual actors were acted upon, in which they themselves acted, and within which they contributed to events. It is within such structural grids that individuals and their actions – including the active, creative dimensions of these actions – need to be positioned if one is to truly understand them.

The Key Issues section in the chapter on Marx entitled ‘The Critique of Capitalism’ is located in this period, and it shows how he mapped out the large, macro outlines of a particular, but widespread, type of society: a capitalist society. It focuses on the ‘genesis, functioning and crisis tendencies’ (p. 44 of Chapter 1, Karl Marx) of that kind of society. The powerful dynamics of the capitalist economic system is the theoretical theme of this section. And within this theme Marx goes on to single out a number of particular substantive aspects or processes for special attention. One of these is his analysis of how capitalism turns the labour power of individuals (their capacity to work) into a commodity like all others, reducing it to a monetary value to be bought and sold in the market place. This ‘commodification’ of human labour power is intimately bound up with the relentless pursuit of profit necessary for the survival of economic units within capitalist systems. Everything in capitalist societies, the message goes, even the capacity of human beings to labour, is liable to be made into a commodity. These major structural dynamics, in turn, play a large role in explaining the more specific substantive struggles ‘between capital and labour to increase productivity (by extending the working day, intensifying effort during this time, or boosting output by cost-effective, labour-saving techniques)’ (p. 45 of Chapter 1, Karl Marx).

To repeat the point made above, these observations and claims about the characteristics of capitalist society are generalizations, in the same way that claims about ontological characteristics of societies in all times and places are generalizations, but these *substantive* generalizations are restricted to dynamics and processes within a particular kind of society. In forceful messages about the way in which the structural dynamics of modern Western societies mould the subjectivities of the individuals who inhabit them, both **Marx’s** writings and the strain of **Max Weber’s** thought found in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, describe how profit and loss accounts dominate the ways of thinking within industrial, capitalist societies in ways unimaginable in previous times, and in other kinds of society. **Georg Simmel** makes similar points about the way in which the ‘form’ of money worked in the German and French societies of the early twentieth century. He reflected on the character of money as an abstract means of establishing relations between people at a distance, organizing social relations between them in such a way that it ‘efface(s) the details of individual personalities’ (p. 95 of Chapter 4, Georg Simmel). Simmel also taught us, compellingly, in his meditation on urban existence in the early twentieth century, ‘Metropolis and Mental Life’, how something very similar, and closely related, is at work in how *time* figures within modern societies. The role of time inveigles its way into our lives as a structural feature, or form, that we internalize into our subjectivities. It pressures us through a pervasive ‘rule of the clock’ – shown in some of

its most insidious forms in Simon Williams's 'Seeing Things Differently' section on the social structuring of sleep (Chapter 22, **Hochschild**), and in Karin Widerberg's research on 'the times of tiredness', cited in her chapter on **Smith** – that is as organizationally efficient as it is existentially intrusive.

The theorization of the structural imperative of profits in capitalist societies, and of the disturbing, displacing consequences this imperative had for the overall character of society, was not the only major aspect of the character of modernity thematized by the early key sociological thinkers. **Max Weber** noted the potent, ambiguous force of another phenomenon, that of 'rationalization', as a dominant and widespread dynamic working within and through modern social structures. Rationalization (*Zweckrationalität*) indicates a potentially useful but narrow way of thinking preoccupied with the completion of tasks in a disciplined and ordered manner. Often labelled as purposive or *instrumental reasoning* (see the concept glossary box on **instrumental reason** in Chapter 13, Jürgen Habermas) in the sociological literature, this 'type of rationality [is] oriented exclusively towards the efficient maximization of practical goals' (p. 62 of Chapter 2, Max Weber). Weber had noted that instrumental reasoning was implicated in the workings of capitalism, as he emphasized the 'elective affinity' of the protestant ethic of restraint and denial with the disciplined forms of bookkeeping and control involved in economic units producing for the market. However, this mode of thinking went much further, permeating almost every aspect of modern life.

Instrumental reasoning is double-edged. For many, it promised the careful, precise harnessing of reason to any number of complex projects of social improvement, order, and security. But shrewd and thoughtful thinkers also saw the dangers. Instrumental reasoning finds its natural home within bureaucratized forms of organization, which can all too easily focus excessively on achieving goals and targets at the expense of a richer, more layered understanding of individual lives and societal values. Weber was deeply anxious about the growing dominance of this kind of thinking within the major institutions of society, and about the effects it would have on human beings. He worried that placing thought and reason so much in the service of finding the most efficient ways and means (the best 'instruments') with which to pursue goals already formulated elsewhere would lead to a narrowing of vision and creativity, a disenchantment of life. Individuals would be socialized into organizational roles set up simply to deliver such targets. The freedom of these individuals to embrace responsibility and exercise their own judgement would be systematically curtailed by the standardization of tasks in hierarchical chains of command. The damage that can potentially be inflicted by these institutionalized forms of instrumental reasoning is that much greater when the goals and targets pursued are themselves narrow. In each period of modernity these objectives have tended to be gathered disproportionately around the pursuit of profit, public and private sector financial targets, or top-down blueprints of social engineering that provide little space for the voices of those whose lives will be affected.

In justly famous reflections, Weber wrote of the dangers of allowing such bureaucratic rationalization to pervade society's organizations. The Key Issues section 'The Disenchantment of the World and the Rationalization of Life' in Lawrence Scaff's chapter on

**Weber** discusses the German thinker's fear that science, bureaucracy, and economics were combining in the early twentieth century to confine individuals within an 'iron cage' of formal rules and 'mechanized petrification,' sacrificing everything else in the service of efficiency. Already, in Weber's time, these developments threatened to produce a society with a mean, threadbare culture, a society in which targets, delivery of financial objectives, formalized policy goals, and quantitative outcomes were taken to excess. People, he feared, would become little more than cogs in the machine, with those in positions of any standing within these machines compensating for their lack of inner fulfilment with airs of 'convulsive self-importance': 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.'<sup>6</sup> **Zygmunt Bauman's** use of Weber's insights in his powerful and moving book, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (see glossary box in Chapter 21) brings home the moral bankruptcy hiding in the folds of instrumental rationality.

### European and American Modernity in the Twentieth Century

Thinkers active in the seventy-year period or so from the 1920s onwards, who appear either in Part II of the book, or in the first part of Part III, tend to focus both on subsequent intensifications of earlier trends and on qualitatively new forms of development. It is true that some of these thinkers concentrated their writings on earlier societies, or on earlier transitions between societies, as in **Michel Foucault's** remarkable analyses of the rise of new forms of punishment through incarceration, and of surveillance and other techniques designed to 'fashion the soul' of individuals in line with the interests of power. Foucault's preoccupations thus appeared to be more 'historical,' but they were certainly influenced profoundly, intellectually, socially, and politically, by the times he lived through. But for most of the writers in this group, which roughly stretches from **Parsons** to **Chodorow**, the substantive focus of their writing embodies, in one way or another, and more or less directly, the challenges thrown up by the middle years of the twentieth century, which are the years that shaped their own personal experiences. There are no neat dividing lines, however, for **Zygmunt Bauman**, who coined the term 'liquid modernity,' and whose work epitomizes the final, contemporary sub-period covered in the next section, was born the year before Foucault, in 1925, and nineteen years before Chodorow. The events of the middle years of the century, moreover, will certainly have left an indelible mark on Bauman's personal formation. Of Jewish descent, he was educated in Soviet Russia after being forced to flee his native Poland by the rise of Nazism. He fought for the Red Army in the Second World War and emigrated to the West in 1968 after being sacked from the University of Warsaw for criticism of the regime.<sup>7</sup> He became a Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds in 1971, but his most renowned works have been written in the thirty years or so since the mid 1980s to his death in 2017.

Bauman's life takes us into the very heart of the history of this middle sub-period of modernity, whose early decades saw the Wall Street Crash of 1929; global economic depression; the rise of fascist governments in Europe and Japan; the consolidation of State Communism in the Soviet Union after the revolution in 1917; the violent, global

conflict of the Second World War; the unspeakable tragedy of the Holocaust; the subsequent founding of the state of Israel in the heart of the Middle East; and the success of the Communist revolution in China in 1949. The recovery years after the end of the Second World War, involving national and international reconstructions, consolidated an era that has been characterized as the age of 'organized' modernity. A more settled international order, symbolized by the founding of the United Nations in October 1945, was combined with strengthened national states as the dominant power centres within individual countries. The extension of the size and reach of these states within their own territories was an especially marked characteristic of the period. These years were marked by renewed faith in the Enlightenment ethos of solving social problems through the application of considered reason, and by the scientific developments that had been a by-product of war, and this was reflected in a political optimism about the possibility of progress. The optimism was evident across the political and intellectual spectrum, from the most conservative world views, through a centrist social democracy that saw the state as a benign means to reform society from the top down, to Marxist faith in a better form of communism, one in which the oppressive functions of the state would eventually wither away.

The sub-period was characterized by a number of different structures, processes, and events that, together, gave the times their distinctive stamp. It saw the apotheosis of organized, monopoly capitalism, based on large enterprises and highly routinized assembly lines, and focused primarily on manufacturing capital; financial capital largely serving the interests of industry; sustained economic growth and stability in the West from the late 1940s to the early 1970s, underpinned by the establishment of a series of global institutions, including the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; the rise and consolidation of the Keynesian welfare state; the strengthening of the collective power of organized labour; the continuation of women's struggles for legal and political rights, for equality in paid employment, and for broader and deeper changes in the patriarchal structure of societies – one raw and unqualified index of radical change in paid work and in the contours of family life in the United States, for example, is an increase in the percentage of married women in paid work from just over 30 per cent in 1960 to just under 60 per cent in 2013/14;<sup>8</sup> the extension of bureaucratic forms of organization, and the concurrent expansion of rule by formal documents and texts; major further developments in science and technology, inscribed in diverse networks from medicine to the military; vast improvements in public health across Western societies; the rise of suburbia, and the subsequent backlash against its perceived social conformity in the 1960s and 1970s from the counter culture, but also, if less stridently, from within the broader popular culture.

Alongside these developments, and jostling with them, there were other forces and processes at work that, slowly, insistently, began to revive memories of the dark side of modernity, and to slide question marks under the power of reason to solve social problems, and to place them over the optimism that seemed to have renewed itself after the terrible events of the 1930s and 1940s. Already by the end of the 1940s, direct European imperialism in the form of colonization of the countries of Africa and Asia was being rolled back in the face of national liberation movements and the declining economic and military power of the colonizing powers. This took place alongside: the extension of US

and Soviet neo-colonialism; the entrenchment of the Cold War, including the authoritarian methods used to repress popular uprisings in Hungary in 1956 and the 'Prague Spring' of 1968, which caused much soul searching among the European Left about their support for Soviet Communism; the wars in Korea, Algeria, and Vietnam; the rise of the civil rights movement, centred around race issues in the United States, and around anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical themes in Europe; the struggle for equality in the realm of sexuality, and in other areas of exclusion and discrimination; large-scale migration from former colonies to countries in Europe, especially France and the UK, and from Central America to the United States; the simmering, but marginal, unease of liberal opinion within Western nations about the major structural inequalities between nations built into global trading, production, and financial arrangements; the Oil Crisis of the 1970s and the economic recession that accompanied this; monetarist and anti-Keynesian government policies in the UK and the US in the 1980s, together with the deregulation of markets, the first wave of privatizations, and a reaction against the welfare state, marking the beginnings of the global rise of neo-liberalism.

These major structural configurations, processes, and events should be kept firmly in mind when identifying and reading through each of the various substantive Key Issues sections in the chapters on the key thinkers of this period. I will focus some theoretical comments around **Robert K. Merton**, who, together with his former teacher – and colleague for the short time before Merton moved from Harvard to Colombia in 1941 – **Talcott Parsons**, dominated North American sociological theory in the middle of the century. This was a mixed period in the United States, in which the Great Depression of the 1930s gave way to the state intervention and military spending of the early 1940s, and to the uninterrupted period of domestic economic and social stability in the post-war years. While the attack on Pearl Harbor was certainly traumatic, the absence of any other military conflict on home soil was in stark contrast to the European experience.

Parsons had made a theoretical theme of the rise of the cultural and organizational *norms of universalism* (judging people's performance by general, one-size-fits-all criteria) and *specificity* (relating to others in specific, narrow, and impersonal ways, rather than thinking about them in a more holistic manner, concerned about their well-being across categories and roles) within the development of modernity, in detailing his 'pattern variables' (see p. 132 of Chapter 7, Talcott Parsons). These impersonal, narrowly focused, and one-size-fits-all forms of organization represented a mindset thoroughly imbued with, and intent on deepening, the rationalization processes elucidated by **Weber**. In theorizing the 'pattern variables', which also included an emphasis on achieved qualifications and credentials, Parsons not only described them but clearly also approved of them in moral, normative terms as processes designed to optimize equality of opportunity, promoting meritocracy over heredity, privilege or connections. His accounts often show more faith in the ability of rationalization processes to deliver the enlightenment promise than was evident in Weber's more ambivalent writings. However, in his defence of the humanizing ethos and broader vision of the professions, and in other careful gestures towards forms of regulation designed to curb narrow self-interest, Parsons suggested that he wasn't entirely happy to leave the dominant systems of modernity entirely to their own devices. On the

other hand, as Bob Holton's chapter indicates, he probably showed too much faith in the impact of normative rules to successfully neutralize self-interest and sectional power (p. 137 of Chapter 7, Talcott Parsons).

Merton's analysis of functions and structures, as recounted in the Key Issues sections of 'Structural and Functional Analysis' and 'Middle-Range Theories', reflects these years of highly organized modernity. Merton's normative position closely paralleled that of Parsons, but he backed away from the latter's grand theory mode of sociological theory. Instead, Merton developed specialist theories dealing with specific aspects of society, aiming to identify key elements of the workings of social structure in relation to these aspects. A cluster of notions intended by Merton to unpack the idea of structure, including the concepts of *status*, *status-sets*, *roles*, and *role-sets*, were crafted in order to facilitate this kind of analysis. In line with this, the Seeing Things Differently section in Piotr Sztompka's chapter on Merton show how these concepts can be used to illuminate the specific sets of practices perpetuating a generalized structural bias against mothers in paid work across Western societies. Taking the case of a heterosexual couple who have just become parents, both of whom are in paid work, Sztompka's first move is to highlight the structural complexity of the *status* of paid worker within the complex conditions of organized modernity. He does this through sketching out *the set of different roles within this status*, with each of the different roles involving their own cluster of tasks, duties, and obligations. Each of these clusters of tasks, in turn, typically involves the person-in-focus undertaking them in a variety of role relationships with other workers, each of whom, in turn, relies on that person-in-focus to perform a range of functions.

By using Merton's structural categories, Sztompka is thus able to indicate how it is possible to identify and consider each of the plural components and networks involved in the role expectations attached to the status of a paid worker. In doing so, his account also begins to lay bare what would be required by a workplace strategy to lessen the demands made on parents at work to make space for the additional demands made by their newly acquired status as parents to a young child. These general points, transferable across many situations in the era of organized modernity, serve, perhaps somewhat paradoxically, to underline the fine-grained, *situationally-specific* character of the demands attached to the role-sets of many paid workers. The vision, energy, and commitment required to adjust the functioning of a role-set within a complex organization would require a good deal of specific knowledge of specific operations. Such vision, in turn, would typically be most effective if the local knowledge and practical wisdom of workers involved in the day-to-day nuances of role relationships, and in the integration of tasks, were included in any necessary restructuring. This would, however, necessitate an ethos at odds with the impersonal, universal, one-size-fits-all ethos of the bureaucracies that were consolidated in the middle years of the twentieth century, and which have become even more entrenched in many organizations in the twenty-first. As long as there is only, or even primarily, an emphasis on the narrow instrumental efficiency of the workplace, there will be little genuine space to accommodate the needs of working parents. It is important *to think across* key thinkers at this point, and to note that the processes we have been discussing also chronically intertwine with the deeply sedimented gender norms discussed

by **Chodorow**, **Gilligan**, and **Hochschild**. The use of Merton's categories enables us to see the structural mechanisms in the workplace that will ensure that these norms place additional burdens on the mother, rather than the father. They expose just why it is the mother who will end up paying for the limitations of the hegemonic forms of rationality within the workplace. The account also brings out the plural nature of conditions necessary for change, for it clarifies why goodwill, ideological illumination, legal changes, or the adjustment of formal rules will not alter such situations unless they are *also* accompanied by an informed and flexible commitment to adjusting structural mechanisms. Each of these conditions is a necessary but not sufficient condition for positive change.

### Radical, or Liquid, Modernity in the Twenty-First Century

The final period of substantive Key Issues, from the 1990s onwards, can be usefully framed by the general substantive concepts pertaining to the notions of radical and liquid modernity. These are broad labels given to the current period by different key thinkers, and are ways of providing an umbrella theme under which a number of interlocking theoretical concepts can be drawn together. I will begin by introducing some of the most important concepts of radical and liquid modernity. This will be followed by an outline of some of the most salient features, processes, and events of the historical period, to differentiate this period from those that have come before. I will then finish the section by briefly mentioning just some of the many additional substantive conceptual themes that can be found in the Key Issues sections of Part III, with the suggestion to readers that they ask themselves which features of the historical period (either sketched in below, or from the reader's additional knowledge of the period) can be illuminated in a deeper way by bringing a particular conceptual theme to bear on them.

First, let us look briefly at the general notions of radical or liquid modernity. Craig Browne's chapter on **Anthony Giddens** explains how the influential British sociologist, in presenting radical modernity as a transition from the previous sub-period of modernity, sees it in terms of a 'deepening and intensifying of core components of modernity', rather than as something entirely new. **Zygmunt Bauman**, for his part, uses the metaphor of liquid modernity to say something very similar. He emphasizes the continuing power of capital to break down 'fences, barriers, fortified borders and checkpoints.'<sup>9</sup> Both thinkers, however, believe that the intensification of modernity wrought by the new phase of history has brought about changes that are profound, and against which there is no turning back.

Bauman is clear that human life will never be the same again, as the evolving systems of capitalism, consumerism, technology, communications, and bureaucracy, among others, have finally brought about a situation in which, as he puts it, time has triumphed over space. The richness of interactions in particular places have been denuded by the constant, impatient intrusion of interests, pressures, communications, commands and injunctions, from elsewhere. Giddens talks about this as a process of 'disembedding', in which local sites of interaction are 'hollowed out' by powerful distant forces, whether these take the form of: decisions from the headquarters of multinational companies in faraway cities,

or from the federal parliament of a national or continent-wide state; injunctions mediated by revolutionary technological developments; the latest, 'universally applicable', fashion in business management produced within the social sciences, or other arms-length 'expert' discourses.<sup>10</sup> Disembedding forces have unsettled and subverted local practices in countless distant localities. Disembedding is overlaid with a sense of the mercurial and the unpredictable in Bauman's most telling metaphors. The metaphors here are of speed and impersonality as he speaks of the 'light' and 'liquid' nature of power in the age of instant communication and command, and the tendency of the flows of finance, capital, information, military power, and so on, to see all kinds of territorially rooted social bonds and networks simply as 'an obstacle to be cleared out of the way'.<sup>11</sup>

Both Giddens and **Ulrich Beck** see the current stage of modernity as one in which actors are socially induced to constantly monitor their own circumstances in response to the realities of incessant change within these conditions. Both thinkers also use the term 'reflexive modernization' to characterize this state of affairs. Giddens's approach to radical modernity is to take the four general substantive categories of (i) capitalism, (ii) industrialism (which is different from capitalism as it can also exist, of course, in other types of society, such as communism), (iii) surveillance and administrative control, and (iv) the centralization of the means of violence, and to flesh them out by linking each one of them to a corresponding institutional dimension of *globalization*. These institutional dimensions are the world capitalist economy, the international division of labour, the nation-state system, and the world military order. Giddens sees a concentration of power in each of these institutions, and, like Beck, believes that the continued modernist attempt to impose efficiency, order, and control in each area, through the strategic use of knowledge, is producing a *risk society*.

There is an acute tension here between two dimensions of the situation. On the one hand, there is the top-down desire for control identified by **Weber**, and a headstrong, less than refined, use of available power to pursue the corresponding goals. On the other hand, the webs of social, technological, and natural relations into which these endeavours are cast are full of intricacy, complexity, and complication. The result is the production of a plethora of 'unintended consequences', ranging from the relatively innocuous to the catastrophic. Giddens and Beck also make much of the ways in which contemporary society's extended, globalized social networks and systems cut across, above, and below nation states, sidestepping the 'containing' capacities of such states. Many contemporary risks, for example, spill over the boundaries of nation states. The unintended 'risk' consequences of industrial society, for example, are apparent in the constant vigilance required by nuclear and chemical developments, in the corruption of food chains and the pollution of the seas, and in the effects of global warming, and these headlines just scratch the surface. Beck criticizes dominant strands within contemporary sociology for too often failing to adapt to these new conditions, continuing to adopt the stance, by now inappropriate, of always equating societies with countries or nations. Beck gives the label 'methodological nationalism' to this perceived widespread failing of sociologists, and advocates new, creative, more adequate forms of thinking (see the thinker glossary box on Beck, p. 156).

When attempting to identify the *substantive* Key Issues sections in each key thinker chapter, it will be helpful to keep in mind the tension we've just mentioned. This is the tension *between* the narrow and impersonal criteria for the pursuit of goals employed within the key institutions of radical modernity *and* the complexity of the domains in which the consequences of these goal-directed projects work themselves out. The judicious, sensitive intelligence required to address complexity in sufficiently modest, reasonable, and humane ways, and so in ways that limit the damage done, seems to be chronically at odds with the clunky modes of operation retained by many of the institutions and systems of radical modernity.

These and any of the other substantive concepts that are picked out as themes in the Key Issues sections in Part III of *Key Sociological Thinkers* can each be used as a lens through which to interrogate and analyse the key social and historical developments of this period. The repeated question should be: what additional light does this substantive Key Issue throw onto any one of the key developments, processes, and events of this period? The aim is to bring the general substantive concepts, which are the 'themes' of the Key Issues sections, into dialogue with the bare bones of the socio-historical developments of the period. This should allow a deeper, broader, better conceptualized sense of its general history. By offering a clear sense of the most powerful general dynamics at work in this era, the substantive themes also provide a powerful frame for any investigation wishing to go on to look at the particular ways in which these general dimensions of histories unfold in various ways in particular countries, or in relation to particular sets of practices stretching across and between countries.

The dominant forces at work within the contemporary historical sub-period of modernity saw the decline in traditional forms of manufacturing, and the deepening and intensification of processes in which the market was 'set free' from many forms of regulation within and beyond nation states. This took the form of a much more extensive deregulation of markets, the selling off of states assets through privatization, and the growth in power and reach of transnational companies. The forms of capitalism developed within such transnationals also became greatly diversified on the back of new technologies and more supple forms of organization. These allowed the development of flexible modes of production, prompting the diversification of products and the corresponding creation of multiple niche markets. All this put a premium on the aesthetics of design, specialized tastes, rapid changes in style, and sophisticated marketing techniques, which replaced many of the standardized techniques of mass production that had characterized the industrial economy in the middle years of the twentieth century.

These 'Post-Fordist' developments began to gradually replace the standardized, functional mode of mass production that had played such a significant role in fostering the settled, relatively homogeneous, economic, social, and political structures of the early post-war decades. The significant elements of truth in the **Marxist** emphasis on the weight of the economy in wider causal processes were apparent in how the stability of the social landscape steadily gave way to a growing sense of flux, volatility, and unpredictability. The consequences for workers of the more 'flexible' economy was a labour market that demanded a high level of skills, a multiple skill set, and adaptability and commitment,

which all made it more problematic to organize trade unions along straightforward occupational lines. A core of highly skilled workers suited to the new conditions began to develop, but alongside a growing number of more marginal workers on the periphery, restricted to menial, insecure, and peripheral jobs – the new precariat.<sup>12</sup> The workers marginalized by these developments were often clustered in regions, suburbs, and estates that had been home to the old, declining industries.

These developments were accompanied by the globalization of capital; the rise of the service sector; the further expansion of world trade; the deregulation of financial markets, which themselves were growing exponentially; and the political hegemony of neo-liberalism. These processes, in turn, were deeply interwoven with the new waves of information and communication technology that served to radically compress time and space. This means that distant places seep into local imaginations more routinely than ever before, and these places also become more and more reachable to financial speculators, traffickers, and everyday folk alike, by pressing some buttons, clicking a mouse or touch pad, or through the burgeoning forms of social and interactive media. These changes accompanied, and, in significant ways, were aided by the fall of the Berlin Wall and of communism across Eastern Europe in 1989, by the ending of the Cold War, and by the expansion and development of the European Union. The cumulative transformations (i) diminished, to a greater or lesser extent, the power of individual nation states to control or regulate key areas of activity within their borders; (ii) created fear among those in non-Western societies whose traditional practices seemed to be under threat from the forces of globalization; and (iii) led to a slow, insidious sense of neglect in declining or peripheral regions of the West as free market forces chose to pass them by. All of this resulted in pent-up feelings of disaffection, experienced in subtly varied ways by individuals depending in large part on their social location. There was a slow burning experience of anomie and loss of meaning by individuals and communities as the continued domination of economies and administrative orders by narrow instrumental rationality became ever-more visible, with the ever-quickening cycle of styles and fashions in commodities and with the arbitrary, barely understood, rationales for ever-changing targets within an escalating audit culture. In the 1990s the cultural and intellectual phenomenon of postmodernism expressed the spirit of the times in its disillusionment with grand narratives of progress, from Marxism to Science, and from Reason to Democracy. It was felt that the events of 1989 and their aftermath had left humanity without any feasible alternatives to capitalism, and that the hopes and aspirations for a better world set in train by the Enlightenment had reached an end. Hence, the most extreme forms of postmodernism expressed a sense of nihilism, cynicism, disbelief, and a lack of hope.

This was a kind of structural pessimism, which somewhat inchoately, but resonantly, expressed sadness and discontent with the ways in which the powerful social structures of modernity had distorted and undermined the potential for social progress. The perception was of a seemingly intractable combination of forces, with the prime movers being self-interest, narrow instrumental rationality, destructive forms of masculinity, and a callous or, at best, careless disregard for the fate of the marginalized. These major systemic forces had dashed any hope there might have been to create societies whose

mission was to nurture human flourishing rather than to pursue the narrow goals of control, efficiency, and profits. Since the 1990s, this cultural temper has been overlaid by a tumultuous set of changes in global strategic-political relations marked decisively by the events of 9/11: the subsequent decisions by the US and its allies to invade Afghanistan and Iraq; the spread of activities of organizations such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram, and other Islamist insurgent organizations; the Arab Spring in 2012, its tragic aftermath in many countries, and the related civil war in Syria, including the major humanitarian and refugee crisis it produced. By 2015 there were a staggering 21.3 million refugees worldwide, with 36 per cent of these coming from just two countries – Syria, 4.9 million, and Afghanistan, 2.7 million – both at the centre of these geopolitical processes.<sup>13</sup> The rise of the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) from the turn of the century has taken place alongside, and has been interwoven with, these other developments, and is part of a broader set of changes involving developing or newly industrializing countries that has greatly complicated the received picture of the global economy.

Cultural pessimism and economic and geopolitical developments have been closely interlinked, and a challenge for contemporary thinkers is to clearly articulate the precise character of their relationship. The postmodern political critique of grand narratives, when the latter are thought of as top-down blueprints for society, has been vindicated in the minds of many. Some see no way to resurrect idealism and the spirit of protest and reform in this context, but others refuse to bury hope, and they search for new and appropriate ways of imagining, and contributing to, a better future. There is a search for new visions of balance between the wider picture and local, situated experiences. And there is a corresponding search for a balance between order and efficiency, on the one hand, and respect for diversity and a concern with human flourishing, on the other. In the contemporary context, balance requires compromise, empathy, tolerance, and intelligence. Balance, achieved with an acute sensitivity to context, might not be the stuff of traditional calls to arms, but it does, incontestably, signal something essential about what has gone wrong, and of the sensibilities that need to be fought for. Sociological thinking has an essential part to play in this rethinking, with all the lessons of the past channelled into the present. The realities of the twenty-first century suggest that sociological thinkers need to pay serious attention to (i) the complexity and nuance of social relations; (ii) the chronic, multifaceted interdependencies, which are part of this complexity, that have made the world a much smaller place than it used to be; and (iii) the subtle texture of the voices of people situated in – anchored in – a variety of different positions within this complexity. The key sociological thinkers have much to say that is relevant to these matters.

One strand of protest in the twenty-first century has tended to be defensive, turning inward, searching for religious, nationalist, ethnic, and other forms of ideological and existential certainty in a frightening, rapidly changing world. These forms of dissent tend to scapegoat certain categories of ‘others’, (see **Theodor Adorno** on ‘identity thinking’) while showing little interest in understanding the social experience of these others, let alone in trying to carefully situate those experiences within social-structural locations. Racists and fundamentalists both belong to this strand, but because they are looking for conflicting forms of certainty and security – one based on nationalist or

ethnic forms of exclusivity and intolerance, the other based on faith-based forms of exclusivity and intolerance – they often lock horns. But one mustn't lose sight of their similarities. Another strand of protest tends to be more progressive, its proponents ready, when they are at their best, to engage openly with specific aspects of changing realities as they look for ways forward. These protests tend to be focused on specific issues, and the focus tends to be on what is wrong rather than on any detailed blueprint for the future. Among these there are the massively supported anti-war demonstrations before the invasion of Iraq; the anti- or counter-globalization movement, demonstrating against the overwhelmingly unregulated effects of economic globalization; campaigners against human rights violations, gathered around a variety of high profile organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch; the worldwide environment movement; and activists protesting against growing levels of inequality, within which the Occupy Wall Street movement has been the most prominent.

All this activity has been set against the backdrop of the events mentioned above, but was also fuelled by the global financial crisis of 2008, which was followed by recession and severe austerity policies in many countries, and also by a growing awareness of the extent of inequality within and between nations. The slogan of Occupy Wall Street was 'We are the 99%', pointing to the dominance of wealth by the top 1 per cent of income earners in the United States, with Occupy representing the other 99 per cent. It is widely accepted that the top 1 per cent of American earners receives roughly 20 per cent of the country's income. This is in a situation where differences in wealth outstrip even the acute differences in income, both in the United States and worldwide. In the United States, the top 0.01 per cent have gone from owning just less than 3 per cent of wealth in the mid 1970s to over 11 per cent in 2013.<sup>14</sup> Globally, the wealth of *the richest 1 per cent* in the world is 65 times the total wealth of *the bottom half* of the world's population, and seven out of ten people live in countries where economic inequality has increased in the last 30 years.<sup>15</sup> And, of course, these processes of economic, geopolitical globalization have taken place at the same time as the full threat of climate change resulting from human economic activity has been widely recognized.

Within the frame of radical or liquid modernity, which we noted at the beginning of the section, an array of theoretical themes can be found within the Key Issues sections, or the Seeing Things Differently sections, that clearly correspond to this sub-period of modernity. Each of these substantive themes can fruitfully be reflected upon, and discussed, in relation to the socio-historical summary of this section. The central question is whether, and how, the themes brought out in the Key Issues sections of a selected thinker can provide added critical purchase and insight into a more journalistic, surface-level reading of the summary histories of sub-periods. What does one learn by focusing on particular themes thinkers have developed to pick out powerful general features, forces, processes, and dynamics at work within a sub-period? With the emphasis I've placed throughout on instrumental rationality, for example, I've indicated that there are formidable continuities from the themes of earlier thinkers. Here, I will gesture towards a number of examples drawn directly from the key issues preoccupying the contemporary thinkers of Part III. Some of these substantive issues have quite clear continuities with

themes from earlier periods of modernity – but they are rendered in relation to processes that have now spread, deepened, and intensified. In the brief sketches I provide, it should be noted how many of the thinkers draw on their own ontological insights to inform their substantive themes.

Examples of the kinds of themes I am referring to in Part III of *Key Sociological Thinkers* are, briefly, as follows. Ralph Schroeder's Seeing Things Differently heading 'American Militarism', in the chapter on the historical sociologist **Michael Mann**, draws from Mann's ontological separation of power into the four types of Ideological, Economic, Military and Political (IEMP). It does this in order to highlight the huge responsibility of the analytically separable role of one of these types of power, military power, in the United States' international actions in the twenty-first century, and, in particular, in its decision to go to war in Iraq. Simon Williams's Key Issue 'Gender, Love and Care ... Across the Globe' in his chapter on the work of **Arlie Hochschild**, celebrated for her insights and research into emotional labour, focuses on some of the less visible forms of economic power at work in the transnational sphere. This reveals that those impersonal mechanisms of money theorized by **Simmel** in the early years of the twentieth century are as alive as ever in the twenty-first, for this section recounts Hochschild's theorization of 'global care chains' in which three sets of workers are connected in a hierarchical network of practices that stretch across the globe. In this network, Williams explains, migrating mothers from the Global South:

care for the children of professionals in the first world, [while] a second set cares for the migrants' children back home, and a third cares for the children of the women who care for the migrants' children.

It is poverty and the fraught quest for income that is the key motivating factor instigating this process, a social process in which money, again, acts as 'an abstract means of establishing relations between people at a distance', organizing social relations between them in such a way that it 'efface(s) the details of individual personalities' (p. 95 of Chapter 4, Georg Simmel). But now it does so in an era of globalization, in which highly developed infrastructures of travel and communication allow the 'free' market to move labour around as easily, and as impersonally, as it used to move material commodities around.

The ontological commitments of **Bruno Latour** and Actor Network Theory are to such things as the significance of 'enacted associations', the scale of networks, the lengths of chains of interaction, the processes by which actors, technologies, and things become 'enrolled' in ventures, the way they are then mobilized, and to taking seriously the ubiquitous forms of human and non-human combination in social life. In Steve Matthewman's Seeing Things Differently section 'Understanding the Changing Status of "Planned Weather Modification"', these ontological elements are themselves interwoven with a substantive set of scientific and technological practices that first emerged in the middle of the twentieth century but which have been pursued with particular vigour, if fitfully, since the 1990s. These are practices of sufficient import that the United Nations has banned them in warfare. Matthewman gives flesh to the bones of Latour's

abstract, ontological concepts by using them to analyse this particular set of generalized practices within the age of radical modernity. By doing so, he also allows us to see something of the broader generalities of the age in what could otherwise be construed as an entirely idiosyncratic set of practices. We find out what these concepts look like once they are rendered substantive by being clothed – in Matthewman’s example and in many others explored by ANT researchers – in the conditions and practices of a particular period. As a result, we can see how lessons from one set of scientific practices in the late modern age can be *transferred* (or *transposed*, to use the popular and resonant term employed by **Pierre Bourdieu** in his notion of *habitus*) to other sets of scientific practices in the period.

Michèle Barrett’s chapter on **Stuart Hall** includes a Key Issues section on ‘Photography: The Shadow of Racialised and Exclusionary Violence’, which considers the consolidation of a distinct photographic aesthetic, exploring black identity, whose generalized conditions of existence only seemed to come to fruition towards the end of the twentieth century. And her Seeing Things Differently section is entitled ‘Difference and Identity at the Intersection of Global Media, Migration and Diaspora’. Both sections provide fertile material with which to think about significant aspects of social processes that are generalized across many sites and sets of practices within radical modernity. Both sections are additionally instructive in pointing to ways in which the social and historical conditions that give birth to particular kinds of practice are usually plural, intersecting and interweaving with each other. Causation is very rarely brought about by just one key factor, where other factors, comparatively insignificant, swim as mere minnows in its shadow. More often than not, a number of generalized and powerful key factors combine to bring about an event or a process.

Jeffrey Mast’s Key Issues section ‘Political Power, between Ritual and Performance’ relates how **Jeffrey Alexander** employs what he calls a ‘cultural pragmatic’ framework to examine the role of performance in Barack Obama’s rise to power. As with most *substantive* Key Issues sections – as is no doubt becoming apparent – the section combines ontological features with substantive concepts from the age of radical or liquid modernity. Hence, at the abstract, ontological level, Alexander combines **Durkheim’s** framework on the importance of rituals in creating solidarities with highly general notions and metaphors taken from theatre. However, he combines these with an understanding that in the highly differentiated contexts of radical modernity (*conditions of defusion* – see Chapter 24), the cultural performances of those holding, or seeking, positions of power have to be that much more consummate than in former times, and are correspondingly far more contingent. This example then goes one step further to also involve *substantive concepts of direct relevance just to the specific history and society of the United States* (see the third type of concept on p. 17) For it is explained how the ultimate challenge for Obama on the national stage was to become a ‘collective representation’ that both symbolized and transcended particularistic interests, such as those of African Americans or certain gender groups, in a cultural performance that *fused with*, and embodied, the national audience’s ‘understandings of a hero in their narratives of national identity’.

## Conclusion: Bringing It All Together in Researching Real World Cases

In conclusion, on the coat tails of the Obama example, let me say a little more about how the different levels of theory we have explored, and which one will find in the Key Issues sections, relate to empirical case study research. Among other things, this will allow us to bring the different types of Key Issues – philosophical, methodological, and substantive – together again. In this, it would be difficult to overestimate the importance that particular areas of questioning play in really *focusing research about particular cases in specific times and places*. For once we know what our specific area of concern is – which might only emerge after spending quite a time thinking more generally about a topic area – then we have a much better idea about which general ontological and substantive themes and concepts will be relevant to that issue.

Let us take, as an example, the area of questioning introduced by Karin Widerberg's Seeing Things Differently section 'Nickled and Dimed: Investigative Journalism and the "Working Poor"' (in the chapter on **Dorothy Smith**). The topic area introduced is that of how the working poor manage to simply break even on a daily and weekly basis, and it is presented from the perspective of the person trying to break even, with a commentary from an observer's perspective that analyses aspects of the structural context that the worker-in-focus has to negotiate. The experience of the worker, we learn from a combination of both perspectives, involves such things as reading job advertisements, sending in applications, turning up for interviews, taking often humiliating employment and drug tests, finding the transportation costs, managing a low salary, affording the down payment for a bond on a monthly rent, paying the monthly rent, or the weekly or daily rent, having to pay more to eat out because there are no cooking facilities in a low-rent apartment, risking health problems from having two jobs to break even, and so on. One can immediately see the relevance of the following general *substantive themes from modernity*: capitalism and its various general components; money; instrumental rationality; universalism; an impersonal, highly differentiated division of labour; gender; the commodification of emotions; urbanization; regulation; recognition; and struggles over respect – and several more are relevant here. It would be both instructive and interesting to focus on any one of these substantive themes as a means of reflection and empirical investigation, and with a strategic policy eye on reducing obstacles in the way of the working poor being able to make ends meet.

However, if one focuses on a case, or even a series of cases, in a particular society or time and place, perhaps in one particular city such as New York or Chicago, then one would want to go beyond looking at individual substantive themes in isolation from each other. Now, it is soon apparent, strategic insights are more likely to emerge if one looks at how the substantive themes just listed *take on particular forms and contents in particular societies within modernity* and are also *interwoven with each other*, mutually informing and influencing each other. So, we would begin to look, empirically, at the specific forms and contents of these different forces, and at how they interact with each other in the particular case. In addition, we can also

enlist ontological concepts from key thinkers – relevant in all times and places – such as those refining concepts about the body, space and time, agency, habitus, structural configurations, norms, emotional labour, morality, values, experience, material resources, technology, tiredness, sleep, and so on, to see how these can help us. Generically, they do so in the following ways. First, the typical precision and detail of ontological concepts allow us to focus in a more nuanced and conceptually specific way upon certain aspects of the substantive process. And then, as a consequence, we are able to use these conceptually refined abstractions to guide us to corresponding empirical evidence within the broader processes. In doing so, we are able to ‘fill out’ our knowledge of the detail of the workings of those processes pointed to by the substantive concepts.

An illustrative example of the latter – using ontological concepts to flesh out substantive concepts – would be to combine (i) abstract, ontological insights into emotional labour at any time and in any place, with (ii) the commoditized form it takes within modernity, and with (iii) a particular waitressing role in a specific restaurant chain in a particular district of New York in 2010, at the intersection of gender, race, and class, and in specific forms of interaction, ‘where the subject is located in her body and is active in her work in relation to particular others’ (p. 262 of Chapter 16, Dorothy Smith). Here, if we were so minded, we could then take an additional ontological cue from **Dorothy Smith’s** emphasis on exploring how the things women do hang together. This is what Smith calls women’s ‘ongoing concerting and coordinating’ (although it could apply more generically to any activity or set of activities carried out by any sex or gender). One could ask not only how the various role performances and interactions at work ‘hang together’ over an evening, but also how these activities are combined with the worker’s other activities in time-space, over days, weeks, and months, and in all the spatial sites she inhabits. The lesson is that the ontological concepts and the substantive concepts, and the ways in which we combine them, will guide us towards looking for certain things and not others, and to looking at them in particular ways.

In allowing ourselves to be guided like this by ontological concepts directed at opening up and refining the substantive concepts, we have already also gestured towards the ontologies of other theorists whose work could help to guide our research. This is part of the creative process. One of these other theorists is **Garfinkel**, who has a sophisticated account of how people ‘do’ things that could help here. His approach allows one to analyse the mechanisms through which any form of ‘doing’ is skilfully produced, from ‘doing’ conversations, or public speaking, to ‘doing’ being a coroner, or, in this instance, ‘doing’ waitressing. And also there is **Merton’s** ontological account of the duties and obligations attached to *roles*, and also to the ways in which different *statuses* held by one person – interviewee, worker, co-worker, tenant, consumer, user of public transport, debtor, mother, daughter, and friend – need to be combined and coordinated. Other, further, thinkers could be invoked here, but the two main points are these. First, that it is the specific empirical area, and the specific set of questions, that one alights on that will provide the focus for which aspects of theory are relevant to a research case study. And second, one should feel licensed to combine theories, or

aspects of theories, whenever this might help to produce a better answer to the question at hand. Using the Key Issues sections creatively and imaginatively, while also making the most of the other sections of each chapter, will enable the reader to hone and develop their theoretical skills. These skills are needed now more than ever, in order to rise to the formidable challenges facing sociological thought as we cross into the uncertain, unpredictable third decade of the twenty-first century.

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