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Genealogy of the Social

This chapter traces the origins of social theory from the Renaissance. It argues that it was then, and especially during the Enlightenment, that an idea of the 'social' factor in human life was for the first time systematically developed. It examines the early years of

- British social theory
- French social theory
- German social theory

The chapter aims to demonstrate the convergence of intellectual concerns around a number of themes that have continued to structure social theory until the present. This emerging framework is considered through a discussion of the first global sociologists:

- Auguste Comte
- Herbert Spencer

Search the internet using Google, Yahoo, or any of the other search engines and you will discover that sociology was founded by Auguste Comte in the middle of the nineteenth century.¹ This is the same answer that professional sociologists will often give to non-sociologists when asked about the founding of their discipline. The claim is that Comte discovered 'society' and recognised the need for a new 'science' to study it.

Perhaps things are not so clear-cut as this implies. It is certainly true that Comte invented the word 'sociology', combining the Latin word *socius* ('society')

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with the Greek word *logos* ('study'), but the systematic study of society has more complex roots than this. A more satisfactory answer might be that scientific sociology originated among the intellectual heirs of Comte who built a 'classical' tradition of sociological analysis. Typically, Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx are seen as the 'founding fathers' of the discipline: they moved beyond Comte's insights to establish stronger and more secure foundations. More sophisticated formulations recognise a much larger number of formative theorists as active in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Tönnies, Simmel, Spencer, Pareto, and so the list goes on.

Critics of this point of view have pointed out that the named 'founding fathers' were, of course, men – and, furthermore, white men. Conventional accounts of the history of sociology mention no women and very few men from outside the ethnic mainstream of European history as contributors to it. The initial letters of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, it is sometimes suggested, might just as well stand for 'Dead, White, and Male'. There is a great deal of truth in this. These long-dead figures were certainly male and white, though the fact that many 'classical' sociologists were ethnic Jews makes this judgement more complex than the term 'white' implies. The male bias in lists of disciplinary founders is not a simple distortion, however. Sociological work in this period was largely, though not exclusively, produced within the universities, and these academic organisations did exclude or marginalise women. The disproportionate representation of men in lists of putative founders reflects the disproportionately low number of women who had the opportunity to contribute to the discipline. Nevertheless, an accurate history of sociology ought not to ignore the contributions of female and black thinkers and researchers.

There is, however, an even deeper problem with the narrative of the nineteenth century foundation of sociology. Whatever the significance of Durkheim, Weber, Marx, and their numerous contemporaries for the formation of a social theory, its history is both longer and more complex than these accounts suggest. The discovery of a 'social' element in human life and a study of the forms of human 'society' pre-dated Comte by many centuries.

Society should not, of course, be likened to an uninhabited island awaiting discovery by an intrepid explorer. All humans live in society and have an awareness, however dim, of their social life. Systematic reflection on this social life is, nevertheless, a relatively late and unusual occurrence in human history. A systematic study of social life becomes possible only when people recognise that their association involves the existence of a distinct object – 'society' – that is more than simply the sum of individual actions. The social element in human life has

properties and powers that are different from those of individuals. It is in this sense that society had to be 'discovered' before 'sociology', as the science of society, became possible.

Both society and sociology were glimpsed by the classical Greeks, but it was in the European Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that the significant breakthrough occurred. It was then that 'society' was truly discovered and 'social' influences were recognised as distinct phenomena to be studied in their own right. By the time of Comte, his contemporaries, and his successors, these intellectual discoveries were well established. They made possible the later developments in social thought that Comte christened 'sociology'. This christening was not, then, the founding point for the contemporary discipline of sociology. It is the ideas of the Enlightenment with which we must begin in order to understand the development of social knowledge.

Renaissance and Enlightenment

Systematic theorising about human affairs first appeared in classical Greece and Rome, especially during the great flowering of philosophy and science between the fifth century BC and the third century AD. Such thinkers as Plato (lived 427–347 BC) and Aristotle (lived 384–322 BC) began to investigate the political organisation of the Greek communities and to relate this to domestic and commercial activities. Their ideas put the study of ethics, law, and politics on a par with that of physics and biology. Though social life was seen largely as the public or 'political' life of the 'polity', Plato and Aristotle raised many issues that would eventually be addressed in the form of a 'social' theory.

Many classical texts were lost with the collapse of the Roman Empire, as were the social structures that had sustained the autonomous intellectual life of the classical thinkers. Though the intellectual emptiness of the European 'Dark Ages' has often been exaggerated, scholarly activity outside the Christian Church was virtually non-existent. Not until Arab expansion into the former Roman world were some classical texts rediscovered, and Muslim scholars began to re-examine them. The greatest achievement of this renewal of intellectual activity was that of Abdulrahman bin Muhammed bin Khaldun al-Hadrami (lived 1332–1406), generally known as Ibn Khaldun, who used Aristotelian ideas to explore the conditions under which strong states could resolve social conflicts. Khaldun (1377) posited a sequence of stages of political development in which the rise and fall of states reflects ebbs and flows in their spirits of cooperation and solidarity.

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The rediscovery of classical texts transformed intellectual life in Western Europe. Scholars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries began to see themselves as participants in a 'renaissance' or rebirth of classical thought. Adopting ideas and standards of judgement from classical Greece and Rome, the Renaissance intellectuals built a 'humanistic' outlook that undermined the theological worldview fostered in the Church and made the subjectivity of human experience the starting point for all knowledge. Reflecting and reinforcing the spirit of individualism and rationalism that was developing in the emergent bourgeoisie, their ideas broke with the communal and collective outlooks of the aristocracy and the medieval burgher guilds. The new bourgeois outlook promoted the rational, calculative attitudes of the market that informed the emerging forms of capitalist activity.² Although it remained closely bound to established authority and to the traditionally-grounded status of the aristocracy and the Church, the growth of this outlook encouraged the treatment of both political power and religion as objects of rational, intellectual reflection. This view of the world was expressed in the political philosophies of Nicolò Machiavelli (1505) and Jean Bodin (1576) and in the new approaches to art taken by Leonardo da Vinci (lived 1452–1519) and Michelangelo (Michelagnolo di Lodovico Buonarroti, lived 1475–1564). States and state forms were seen as open to change through individual human action and not as fixed and given for all time. Unquestioning beliefs in supernatural powers grew weaker and individual human powers of thought and deliberation came to carry greater weight in deciding political issues.

This move towards 'a completely secularized attitude to the world from which all irrationalism had been expunged'³ encouraged the conclusion that conscious human control over the world was possible if only the laws that regulate it could be uncovered and understood. Knowledge of these laws would emancipate people from domination by natural and mysterious forces. The Lutheran Reformation of the sixteenth century further loosened the intellectual grip of the Church, but the full implications of these ideas for an understanding of the 'social' world were not drawn out until scholars in the seventeenth century, in self-conscious emulation of the 'Renaissance' thinkers, began to see themselves as agents of an 'Enlightenment' in human thought.

The European Enlightenment was both a product of and a contribution to the slow development of a modern society in Western Europe. Enlightenment scholars, like those of the Renaissance, saw themselves as heirs to the classical tradition. Advocates of the powers of 'reason', they posed a self-consciously critical challenge to traditionalism. In the name of rationality and science they rejected superstition and magic, and they opposed despotic and authoritarian political

regimes. Their conception of rationality was one of formal argument, of logical and mathematical ideas that could be systematised as abstract, theoretical knowledge. Such rational concerns were to be separated sharply from other forms of human thought and experience and become the sole yardstick of valid and reliable knowledge about the world.⁴ This fundamental belief in the power of formal rational thought received its charter statements in the philosophy of René Descartes (1637, 1641) and the mathematics and physics of Isaac Newton (1687), while others soon applied these principles to political and moral life. Denying that human thought could be given any absolute or certain foundations, their 'anti-foundational' approach recognised no authoritative principles, identities, or boundaries except those of reason itself. No established ideas or institutions could be taken as self-evidently legitimate or authoritative. All were to be contested in the court of reason, which would bring final liberation from the inheritance of the Dark Ages. Enlightened about their true powers and abilities, people could, through the powers of their own minds, determine their own futures.

The cultural and political programme of Enlightenment – the so-called 'project' of modernity – was to organise humanity firmly around ideas of rationality, liberty, democracy, and human rights.⁵ Europe was seen as moving from the ancient through the medieval or middle ages to a new, modern age in which Enlightenment ideas would be realised. This European modernity would be radically different from all the 'traditional' social orders that preceded it.

This programme was premised on an awareness of the centrality of the social element in human life. Classical and Renaissance thought had recognised the existence of political, commercial, and domestic institutions, but it was the Enlightenment scholars who first saw these as having a distinctively 'social' character in common. Discovering the social, they constructed 'society' as a distinctive object of scientific investigation. Seeing their project as the scientifically guided reform of human institutions, the Enlightenment theorists saw the need for a specifically social science to inform these reforms. This social theory arose first in Britain and then, because of the close intellectual contacts among the Enlightenment thinkers, in France and Germany.

Britain: Individualism and Romanticism in Social Theory

Thomas Hobbes (1651) and John Locke (1690) were the first to set out comprehensive social theories of politics. Immersed in debates over civil war, regicide,

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and revolution, their political views sought to balance state sovereignty and individual liberty. Both began from individual actions and traced their social consequences. This prepared the way for the far more extensive writings of a group of scholars in Scotland, for whom David Hume became the leading spokesman. Hume's own social theory was developed in fragmentary form through works on general philosophy (1739–40), politics and morality (1751), and English history (1754–62). He based his theory on a psychology of the individual actor and, like Locke, held that humans have certain innate characteristics that condition and propel their acts. But this was not all. These acts are shaped and informed by ideas that, unlike desires, appetites, and drives, are not innate. Ideas come to us from outside, from other people who communicate them to us linguistically. Human nature, therefore, is not completely fixed by human biology. It is shaped through learning and education and so must be regarded as both open and flexible. The motives that inform human actions are culturally formed and vary considerably through history and from one place to another.

Hume recognised two principal motives that enter into all human actions to varying degrees. These are the self-interested or egoistic motive and the 'sympathetic' or altruistic one. Egoistic motives are oriented towards the attainment and satisfaction of individual interests and involve people in rational and pragmatic calculations of individual opportunities and advantages as they strategically pursue their interests. Egoistic motives drive economic activity, establishing common interests around shared opportunities. They also create social divisions around divergent and antagonistic interests. Sympathy, on the other hand, is nurtured in intimate family relationships and is the means through which more extended feelings of fellowship towards others can grow. Sympathy is the emotional basis on which more concrete motives or passions such as ambition, avarice, self-love, vanity, friendship, generosity, and public service are formed. It allows the formation of sentiments of solidarity that tie people into cohesive social groups and establish customs and habits that regulate individual actions.

Egoistically motivated market transactions play a major part in contemporary societies, Hume argued, but modern social arrangements cannot simply be reduced to individual purposes and goals. People are educated within particular cultural traditions that lead them into the specific habits of action that are their customs. Hume held that the laws and customs that result from the 'association' of individuals with one another embody the 'spirit' of the whole people. This spirit infuses their customs and practices and gives their way of life its social character. The ideas and feelings that the members of a population share give

them their solidarity as a people. In acting habitually, according to custom, people unintentionally reproduce the very social institutions that are responsible for these habits. Hume emphasised, however, that actions generally have unforeseen and unanticipated consequences. The social patterns that result from individual actions are constrained and conditioned by existing social patterns as much as they are by individual intentions.

These ideas were further developed in Adam Smith's (1766) account of the 'hidden hand' of social constraint that he saw operating in the capitalist market. Smith's account of self interest has been very influential, but his grounding of this in sentiments of 'sympathy' (1759) is often ignored. He saw sympathy as the basis of all morality and as underpinning the capacity for moral judgement in legal and political matters. Through sympathy with others, people cultivate moral virtues of character and acquire a sense of duty or justice that can temper the pursuit of their individual interest.

Smith's ideas informed the attempts of Adam Ferguson (1767) and John Millar (1779) to construct a history of the development of modern European societies.⁶ These histories were a significant advance on Hobbes and Locke, who had seen individuals, prior to their exposure to civilisation, as living in a 'state of nature'. This natural state, however, was viewed as a purely imagined condition in which all social influences are absent, and the passage from a state of nature to one of civilisation was seen in equally abstract terms. The Scottish theorists recognised that social influences operate at all stages of human life and understood that the differences between civilisation and prior states of existence had to be seen as social differences. These differences were to be documented from evidence rather than merely imagined in ways that fit a preconceived theory. The study of history had to become an evidence-driven activity, oriented towards uncovering the structured processes of change through which one type of society is transformed into another. Using the reports of Greek and Roman historians and of contemporary travellers and missionaries, the Scottish theorists reconstructed a picture of the 'savage' and 'barbaric' hunting and herding societies from which civilised Europe had developed. In turn, it was from the more civilised agrarian societies of the feudal and medieval periods that modern societies, with their nation states and capitalist economies, had eventually developed. The forms of civil government and private property established in pre-modern civilisations had made possible the commercial activities and class relations that flowered in modern societies. These advanced forms of 'civil society' had emerged in classical Rome but had been lost, along with classical culture, with its collapse (Gibbon 1776–81; Ferguson 1783).

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The mainstream of English thought set out a more individualistic account of social life. This was inspired by Jeremy Bentham (1776, 1789), whose theory of action referred back to Hobbes rather more than to Locke. Bentham's 'utilitarian' theory minimised the part played by altruistic and sympathetic motives and saw all action as oriented by the selfish pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. Individuals are purely hedonistic calculators of their 'utility', seeking constantly to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. On this basis Bentham built theories of politics and law according to which social control had to bend itself to the immutably rational and hedonistic motivations of individuals.

This 'utilitarianism' found its fullest and most comprehensive expression in political economy, where David Ricardo (1817), Thomas Malthus (1820), and James Mill (1821) formulated models of commodity production and distribution in competitive markets. The utilitarian view of action was later summarised in Mill's (1829) pioneering study in psychology. The utilitarians recognised that non-rational motives of sentimentality and emotion played a part outside economic life, but they held that the relations of the capitalist market had such autonomy from other social institutions that they could be analysed *as if* individuals were purely rational. They saw the task of social policy as the elimination of any residual irrationality through the reform of social institutions. Malthus's (1798) account of population growth and its relation to food supply, for example, allowed only a minor role for custom and 'moral restraint', and he saw rational self-interest as the principal driving force in human procreation. Population policy had to recognise this and could not be based on moral exhortation.

For all their philosophical radicalism, the utilitarians and other individualist theorists in Britain took for granted a very conventional and traditional differentiation between men and women. The 'individual' of these theorists was implicitly gendered as a man, as only men were thought to be capable, by nature, of the kind of rationality required for effective participation in the public world of politics and economics. Only Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) seriously questioned this assumption.⁷ Denying any natural, biological basis to the conventional differentiation of male rationality from female emotionality, she argued instead that male and female characteristics result from processes of social formation. People become what they are made to be by virtue of their education and their socialisation into a particular culture. An enlightened reform of education, Wollstonecraft argued, would allow women to acquire the rational capacities that had been denied to all but a very few of them.⁸

The emphasis on culture, solidarity, and socialisation in British social theory was taken up by a group of writers who were, in many respects, opposed to the

Enlightenment project. Taking a highly conservative view of the need to retain the more 'natural' cultural practices and social institutions of the past, these so-called Romantics pointed to the contribution that such established institutions could make to social and individual stability and highlighted the dangers inherent in the excessive application of formal rationality to human affairs. Disgusted at the terror and disruption that the French revolution had initiated in the name of rationality and liberty, Edmund Burke (1790) encouraged the retention, in England, of customary institutions that restricted and inhibited individual self-interest. This was echoed in Thomas Carlyle's (1837, 1843) history of the French Revolution and the part played in historical change by 'heroic' leadership, and in Thomas Macaulay's (1849–61) history of England. Romantic ideas were promoted principally through the literature and criticism of Samuel Coleridge, William Wordsworth, John Keats, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron.⁹ Their eulogy of nature achieved its most popular expression in the dramatic account by Mary Shelley (1818), daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, of scientific interventions into life, death, and human nature in her novel *Frankenstein*.

France: Revolution, Science, and Social Theory

In France, the Enlightenment project arose with the decay and revolutionary overthrow of the *Ancien Régime*. Its earliest expression was among so-called physiocrats, such as François Quesnay (1758) and Jean-Baptiste Say (1803), who constructed laws of agricultural activity around the role of self-interest in the expansion of national wealth. The physiocrats recognised a tension between egoistic motives and altruistic ones, but, like the utilitarians, they saw egoistic self-interest as the principal motive in human action. Such ideas influenced the influential study of political despotism written by the revolutionary leader Honoré de Mirabeau (1772).

Broader social and cultural concerns were developed by two closely associated groups of writers searching for laws of social systems and of the ideas around which these systems are organised. Denis Diderot, with Jean d'Alembert, Paul d'Holbach, and Claude Helvétius, produced the *Encyclopédie* to consolidate and summarise these emerging ideas in a 'science of man'. The most important products of these 'Encyclopaedists' were the social and political studies of Holbach (1770) and Helvétius (1772). More distinctly cultural ideas were pursued by the 'Ideologists' – Antoine Destutt de Tracy, Pierre Cabanis, and Marie François Bichat.

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Taking their inspiration from biology, they saw moral values as organised systems of ideas (Cabanis 1802).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau – born in Switzerland but spending much of his life in France – was an important influence on the revolutionaries. Like his mentor Hume and the other Scottish theorists, he assumed a natural sociability and altruism in human beings. He traced, in particular, how social conditions influence individual character and autonomy. In both traditional and modern societies, he argued, a tight political control over natural human sociability is exercised through political and constitutional norms and structures of social inequality (1755, 1762). The causal power of social factors was also theorised by Voltaire (1745) in terms of a cultural ‘spirit’ that shapes the morality of a nation.

The most comprehensive investigator along these lines was the Baron de Montesquieu (1748). Recognising the immense variability of institutions, customs, and practices, he concluded that there can be no fixed or given human nature. The character or personality common to the members of a population varies considerably from one population to another and reflects what Montesquieu referred to as the ‘spirit’ (*esprit*) generated through their association. Each individual acquires a particular spirit of character from those around them, and this determines the ways in which they live their lives. It shapes their institutions and practices and it informs their actions. This was the basis of a social theory of politics in which each political constitution – monarchy, aristocracy, despotism, and republic – was seen as characterised by a distinctive spirit. Monarchies are based on a spirit of honour, aristocracies on a spirit of moderation, despotism on a spirit of terror, and republics on a ‘civic’ spirit. These generalisations formalised earlier suggestions about the spiritual and political decline of Imperial Rome (1734) and the spiritual conditions sustaining traditional despotism in Persia (1721).

Montesquieu also investigated the factors responsible for variations in spirit and social institutions from one place to another. He looked to the environmental factors of climate and ‘terrain’ (landscape, cultivation, and resources), hoping to discover any constant relationships between the ‘external milieu’ (the physical environment) and the ‘internal’ or moral milieu of a society. His argument was that an understanding of environmental influences could allow people to be more rational in applying reason to political matters and so help them better to express the particular spirit of their society. By acting in rationally appropriate ways, social stability and order would not be threatened. Applying this argument to France, Montesquieu advocated the reestablishment of aristocracy and a

consequent strengthening of the spirit of moderation, seeing this as the only way of avoiding a decline into despotism.

Under the influence of the Ideologists, French social theorists gave particular attention to the intellectual aspects of social change. Anne Robert Turgot (1750) and the Marquis de Condorcet (1794), for example, saw cultural change as an orderly, structured process of historical development in which changes in intellectual ideas bring about corresponding changes in the forms of social life. They saw a clear trajectory of social development in Europe that ran from tribal barbarism through pastoralism and agriculture to contemporary French civilisation, and they traced a corresponding intellectual 'progress' from religion and superstition to an age of reason. The Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico (1725) had also produced a study of intellectual development, but he proposed a cyclical rather than a progressive view.

In France, even more than in Britain, the Enlightenment project of individualism and rationalism clashed with 'Counter-Enlightenment' conservatives who sought to roll back the intellectual and political changes of the reformers and revolutionaries. The Comte Joseph de Maistre (1796) and the Vicomte Louis de Bonald held that the Enlightenment had undermined the traditional customs and institutions that produced social order and so made the Revolution inevitable. Inspired by Burke's (1790) reflections on the French Revolution, Bonald and Maistre saw collective and communal elements in social life exercising a powerful and necessary constraint over free individual actions. Thus, Maistre (1810) highlighted the cohesive power of religion and lamented the decline in Catholic belief and practice, while Bonald (1826) explored the part played by language in perpetuating cultural traditions. They held that institutions grow slowly and gradually, without conscious deliberation and under the conditions to which they are best suited, and so acquire the authority of long-established practice. Slow organic growth, guided by tradition, is, therefore, preferable to rational political change. Bonald (1796) held that the destruction of the organic bonds and religious solidarity of traditional societies was a direct consequence of the growth of capitalism and bureaucracy. These forces of rationality were transforming all social relations in the direction of impersonality and calculability, as epitomised by the cash nexus of the market.

Influenced by both the Enlightenment idea of intellectual progress and the conservative reaction to this, the Comte Henri de Saint-Simon advocated rationally constructed forms of collective solidarity and has sometimes been regarded as the first 'socialist'. Rationality in modern societies, he argued, is indicative of the social progress that has resulted from the application of positive scientific

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knowledge. The term 'positive science' – referring to precise and exact knowledge based on observation and mathematics – had been coined by Germaine de Stäel (1801), but Saint-Simon became its principal advocate. Positive science, he held, had spread from one area of study to another, and a new positive 'science of man' would complete the development of the modern sciences and allow their integration into a single, unified science that he called the 'positive philosophy' (1813). This unification was possible, he suggested, because the movements of all material, mental, and cultural phenomena are governed by a single law of 'universal gravity'. Thus, laws discovered in one domain are directly translatable into those of another.

Saint-Simon saw this positive philosophy as an essential element in the Enlightenment project of cultural and social progress. He envisaged its intellectual advocates taking positions of social leadership formerly held by the clergy and reshaping social institutions on a rational, scientific basis. Reform of the educational system would be central to this as it would produce educated citizens capable of applying the positive philosophy in all they do. Impressed by the arguments of Say and the economists, Saint-Simon (1825) thought the central leadership group would be the *industriels*, the industrial entrepreneurs and workers who apply economic knowledge in practical business matters. These proto-socialist ideas of Saint-Simon were pursued as a practical task after his death by Philippe Buchez (the founder of Christian Socialism), Saint-Amand Bazard, Barthélemy Enfantin, Pierre Leroux, and, above all, Auguste Comte.

Germany: Counter-Enlightenment and Reaction

'Germany' did not exist as a unified political entity in the eighteenth century. Political sovereignty in German-speaking Europe was fragmented among a large number of principalities, duchies, and petty states, and many ethnic Germans lived within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Enlightenment project in these lands had first to come to terms with the task of building a strong national state, and Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment movements of thought were less sharply opposed than in Britain and France. German social thought stressed education (*Bildung*) as the means whereby the characters of individual citizens are formed through their inclusion in a common culture. The task of philosophy was to elucidate the cultural values that would best contribute to the formation of individual character. A strong emphasis on the cultural unity and continuity

of nations characterised almost all strands of German thought, and this was often combined with a hostility towards any purely practical intervention in the material world on the basis of technical, empirical knowledge. This found its strongest expression in the Romantic emphasis on the traditional values of the past that defined German identity and that were seen as threatened by British and French ideas of individual rationality. This led to a view that the aims of the Enlightenment could best be pursued through a conservative process of modernisation.

The most unambiguously liberal philosopher in Germany was Immanuel Kant, whose works on epistemology (1781) and ethics (1788) influenced philosophical debates across Europe. In a very important contribution to the understanding of history and geography, Kant (1784) showed that advances in human reasoning and understanding have gone well beyond what any one individual can achieve in his or her own lifetime. The overall level of intellectual attainment in a population increases over time because the achievements of one generation can be passed on to the next through the communication of ideas from one person to another. Thus, language and the culture it makes possible are the means of human progress. The most important contributions to developing this insight into a social theory were those of Johann von Herder and Georg Hegel.

Herder (1784–91) sought to understand German culture by placing it in a larger context of cultural development. He took up Montesquieu's interest in the relationship between cultural spirit and the physical environment, but used this to trace a pattern of global cultural development. Charting the variety of natural environments in which humans could be found, from the North Pole to Asia, Africa, the Tropics, and America, he mapped environmental diversity onto the historical sequence of cultures that constitutes world history. He held that the biblical narrative of human origins, properly deconstructed, provides a plausible account of human origins in the Middle East and the subsequent migrations of human populations across the globe, though current research sees human origins in Africa rather than Asia. The particular historical sequence that leads from Asian prehistory to European modernity and, therefore, to contemporary Germany was driven by the motivating power of the popular spirit or *Volksgeist* that marked each successive society. The popular spirit shapes individual actions under definite environmental conditions and in the context of specific historically constituted opportunities. This collective spirit, then, is the fundamental element in the combination of factors generating historical development.

The spirit of a people defines its collective identity, motivates the actions of its members, and allows them to adapt their society to their environment. The

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means through which such a spirit develops is language, a capacity specific to human beings (Herder 1770). The human mind is able to form complex mental representations only because they are constructed in linguistic form and so are communicable from one person to another. The vocabulary and grammar of a language are intrinsic to the popular spirit, and language is, at the same time, the means through which a people is able to further its cultural spirit. It was for this reason that Herder advocated that intellectuals, poets, and other writers should use the German vernacular rather than the fashionable French that was then the sign of a cultivated personality.

This idea was used in the comparative ethnography of Wilhelm von Humboldt (1795–7). He shared Herder's view that people act in terms of their particular 'national character', understood as the shared animating spirit that is outwardly expressed in their customs, religion, language, and art. He saw each culture as unique, but as varying in the level of 'self-realisation' that it allows. Humboldt claimed that Western culture had allowed Europeans to cultivate their national spirits to a far higher level than had any other population.

Hegel's earliest works in epistemology (1807) and logic (1818–31) were the bases for a political theory (1821) and an account of the historical development of modernity (1831).¹⁰ His social theory took the concept of the popular spirit as its central idea, developing this in opposition to the way in which it had been used by Friedrich Schelling (1797). Schelling had seen all physical forces – mechanical, chemical, electrical, and vital – as forms of spirit, which he saw as the ultimate active force at work in the world. In self-conscious organisms, Schelling argued, spirit becomes, for the first time, conscious of itself and able to move towards its fuller realisation. Hegel returned to the sharper distinction that Kant had made between nature and spirit, but he took over Schelling's ideas on the progressive development of spirit over time.

Hegel made a distinction between the actual or popular spirits that animate particular societies and the abstract human spirit of freedom and creativity that is only ever partially realised in them. Popular spirit is 'objectified' or embodied in the external cultural forms – the institutions and practices – and the way of life that define a particular society. The human spirit had become a dynamic and creative force only very slowly during the course of human history. It had been stifled under the despotic regimes, institutions, and customs of the ancient Oriental world – in China, India, Persia, Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt. As a result, their popular spirits had been conservative and constraining forces. In the classical Greek and Roman worlds, however, the human spirit had been liberated in democratic and aristocratic regimes that encouraged rational, critical reflection.

The classical Greeks lived in harmonious and well-integrated societies where the human spirit informed a popular spirit that found its expression in a cohesive moral order (*Sittlichkeit*), a customary, institutionalised morality rather than the principled morality of abstract ethical systems. The German world that arose when these classical systems collapsed was the first society in which the full potential of the human spirit, as a truly universal 'world spirit', began gradually to be realised. This spirit became the spirit of the new, modern world of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and it provided a reasoned philosophical basis on which contemporary nation states could establish a new moral order to regulate their citizens.

Hegel saw the historical development of this world spirit as occurring through a sequence of historical stages. This spirit developed earliest in family and domestic institutions. In the most primitive societies, governed solely by custom and tradition, no social organisation went beyond this familistic community, and the world spirit remained at this level in the despotic societies of the Oriental world. The development of commerce and property in the medieval world brought separate families and households together into the larger spiritual unity of a 'civil society', forming them into a hierarchy of social 'estates' or classes. In the final, modern stage, spirit is realised in the constitutional state, regulated through public law and judicial administration. The modern state transcends the economic divisions of civil society and establishes an impartial rule of law under which all 'citizens' can exercise their liberty to the full.

While tracing this historical sequence in the Western world, and seeing the German state as the ultimate embodiment of the world spirit, Hegel also saw the various institutionalised forms of spirit as continuing to exist as distinct levels of social organisation. Family relations are at the core of any modern society, but are embedded in the economic relations of civil society, property, and the market. These are, in turn, contained within an overarching structure of state relations. Only in the public sphere of the state can people achieve the full freedom of spirit that is denied to them by the alienating conditions of private life within the family and at work.

The Social Established

By the early years of the nineteenth century, Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment writers in Britain, France, and Germany had transformed the understanding of human affairs. They had discovered and described a specifically

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'social' sphere that could be distinguished from both physical nature and individual mentality. They had, furthermore, built a systematic and disciplined basis for its study. While they brought major differences in philosophy to this scientific work and came to divergent conclusions, it was generally recognised that an empirical study of social life and its historically changing forms would complement developments in other areas of scientific work. Leading scholars felt themselves to be engaged in a similar – and, in many respects, a common – task of intellectual understanding. They were well aware of the intellectual and political differences that divided them, but they were also aware of the boundary that separated their concerns from those of their 'unenlightened' predecessors.

Their shared point of reference was the existence of a distinct and autonomous sphere of 'social' phenomena. This social reality consists of the cultural ideas and values that prevail in a population, that infuse its customs and institutions, and so bring about regular and recurrent patterns of action. It was recognised as a system of interconnected elements that fit together to form a larger 'whole' that can be characterised by its particular 'spirit' or ethos. Many Enlightenment theorists held that social reality could be analysed in much the same way as a mechanical system. Indeed, the growth of scientific knowledge in physical mechanics had been so rapid that the idea of a 'social physics' seemed highly plausible. Opponents of this mechanistic viewpoint stressed the subjective character of ideas and values and held that such spiritual entities had to be understood in terms of their inner principles rather than merely explained by their external characteristics.

There was, furthermore, a wide agreement that while individuals are, through their actions, the creators of this social reality, they are also its products. The character or spirit of each individual was seen as the result of their formation within a social whole. Because the spirit of each society varies and is unique to itself, so individual character varies according to the spirit of the society into which a person is born and lives. Human beings are, like all animals, born with a particular biological inheritance, but they are not completely determined by this. They have the capacity for conscious and rational deliberation and, therefore, for the creation and manipulation of values and ideas. For this reason, human abilities and capacities had to be seen as resulting from the interplay of biological and social determinants.

This plasticity of human characteristics that follows from their shaping by education and the acquisition of culture meant that no simple pattern of motivation could be imputed to human action. Egoistic, self-interested motives were seen as important by all the Enlightenment theorists. Rational actions, oriented

to the attainment of individually satisfying goals, are one of the principal means through which social wholes are produced and reproduced. They are also, however, the means through which individuals come into conflict with each other, driven by competitive pressures to struggle for the maximisation of their interests. Nowhere is this more important than in the economic sphere of commerce and production that had become such an important element in modern societies. While some theorists – most particularly the utilitarians – stressed this as the sole human motive, most Enlightenment theorists saw cooperation and solidarity as important features of social reality and as following from specifically altruistic motives. Individuals, they argued, are predisposed by their biology and their culture to undertake actions motivated by a sympathy and concern for others and for maintaining social cohesion and solidarity.

It was argued, even by the utilitarians and radical individualists, that social phenomena cannot be seen simply as the *intended* products of particular individuals. Institutions, customs, and practices emerge and develop as the largely unintended consequences of purposive individual actions. Only rarely do they directly express a conscious and coherent human purpose. Many theorists held that they are, for the most part, unreflectively produced and reproduced through habitual actions shaped by traditional values. Thus, social wholes have properties that may not be immediately apparent to their participants and so must be uncovered through scientific analysis and investigation. These emergent properties could be the objects of forms of holistic analysis. Social wholes were, nevertheless, seen as emerging in particular physical environments that condition the biological characteristics of individuals and constrain the possibilities of action open to them. Social reality, therefore, had to be seen as the outcome of both 'spiritual' and 'material' determinants, operating in and through the socially formed actions of individuals. Theorists differed, of course, in the weight that they accorded to these factors, but they were in agreement that neither could be ignored.

This complex of ideas was the basis on which a new view of history was constructed. Institutions, customs, and practices change, albeit slowly, and whole societies can be seen to change their structures over time. Social changes do not occur at random, but neither are they completely and transparently planned. They are shaped by the internal structure of the society itself and by the environmental conditions within which it exists. History, therefore, can be seen as a structured process of development from one type of society to another. It was on this basis that the modern world was seen as the outcome of a long series of historical transformations that could, themselves, be studied scientifically and, perhaps, be formulated in 'laws' of historical change.

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These were the foundations on which later nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers were able to build the more comprehensive understandings that came to be recognised as 'sociological'. The word 'sociology', I have shown, was the invention of Comte, but the discipline of sociology and the body of sociological theory that define it were not his invention alone. Through the nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth century there was a massive expansion and proliferation of sociological work that enlarged the various components of the Enlightenment approach to social theory.

Social Theory Goes Global

In the period from the first quarter of the nineteenth up to the second half of the twentieth century a massive expansion of social thought took place, producing what has come to be called 'classical sociology'. Often seen more narrowly as the sociology of the years between 1880 and 1920, this is defined as 'classical' because of its comprehensive, discipline-building character. The term may be misleading,¹¹ but it is certainly correct to identify an extended formative period in which the ideas produced in the Enlightenment and the Counter-Enlightenment were forged into comprehensive systems of social thought that continue to inspire contemporary work.

The building of this formative theory was not confined to particular countries. Its heartland lay in the key countries of the Enlightenment – Britain, France, and Germany – but it soon achieved a global impact. The leading figures travelled abroad to international meetings and congresses, they entered into extended correspondence with each other, and their works were translated into many languages. The globalisation of social theory is no recent phenomenon.

The framework of sociological analysis built in the formative period of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was defined by the intersection of six conceptual themes: cultural formation, systemic organisation, socialisation, nature, interaction, and conflict.

The leading theme – cultural formation – was the view that frameworks of linguistically formed and organised ideas and meanings are central to the 'social' character of human life. It is by virtue of their possession of culture that people are formed into fully human individuals. Cultures were seen as more or less integrated wholes or 'totalities' that shape all events, actions, and processes in such a way that they can be understood only in their cultural context. The most influential theorists were those who aimed to clarify the key mechanisms through

which cultural formation takes place and the nature of the customs and institutions that result.

The idea of systemic organisation focused on the interconnection of individuals into social 'systems' with distinctive and irreducible properties. Conclusions about the relations among system properties could be drawn without any need to examine in detail the individual actions that are, ultimately, responsible for them. Some theorists drew on advances made in physics for their inspiration, seeing societies as systems of forces and energies that could be analysed in terms of their equilibrium conditions.¹² The success of mechanics inevitably made it the principal contender as a model for social system behaviour, but advances in biology led many theorists to explore a different conception of the social system. These writers drew the parallel between physiological processes in organic systems and the idea of the 'social organism'. An emphasis on the 'organic' quality of social life seemed to offer the advantage that historical sequences of events could be conceptualised as the results of organised processes of change from one form of social life to another. Just as biological organisms grow and develop, so social organisms could be seen as undergoing processes of development. In its strongest form, this appeared in 'evolutionist' models that depicted whole societies undergoing progressive, unilinear transformations that involved increases in differentiation and specialisation. Specialised institutions or spheres of activity – economics, politics, religion, and kinship – were seen as resulting from processes of social differentiation that split them off to form specialised system 'parts' or 'organs' carrying out particular 'functions'.

Cultural formation and systemic organisation together defined the key discovery of the social. A third theme was socialisation, understood as the mechanisms through which individuals are culturally formed into fully 'social' beings. The Enlightenment emphasis on 'education' was broadened out into more nuanced accounts of the learning processes through which individual personality and character are formed. Socialisation or enculturation is the process through which the shared ideas and values of a group are learned by individuals and become the basis of the motives that inform their actions and ensure that these are geared to the expectations of others. Psychological approaches based on the physiology of human experience and cognition had also begun to appear during the nineteenth century, and sociological approaches complemented this with accounts of how the communication of ideas and values from person to person ensures that they become incorporated into the minds of a large number of people and so become part of the shared heritage of ideas and values. Some theorists used evolutionary ideas to explore how instincts and inherited conditions

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enter into socialisation. Others focused on the role of cultural factors and processes of imitation and transmission.

The fourth theme in this formative period of sociology was 'nature', whereby the natural environment and the human body were seen as conditioning the ways in which people could relate to each other. The loosest forms of naturalism simply mapped the relations between types of environment and types of society. Stronger forms, however, took environmental factors as crucial determinants of the overall development of societies, seeing the environment as an infrastructure or 'morphology' that conditions social activity and requires that they 'adapt' to it. In its most sophisticated form this rested on an explicitly Darwinian view of 'natural selection'. Naturalism also requires a consideration of the biological characteristics of human populations and their shared biological characteristics, such as instincts, emotions, and interests. For many, however, this led to the use of 'racial' categories. Such racial thinking was endemic to European culture in the nineteenth century, and sociologists accepted this prevailing point of view. In some cases – even into the twentieth century – these views involved assumptions of white European racial superiority. The discrediting of strong biological conceptions of race in recent biology has led to its virtual abandonment as a category in contemporary sociological analysis. The term 'ethnicity' is now preferred as a label for what the early writers referred to as 'race'.

The fifth theme was that of action and interaction. This involved uncovering the motives responsible for human actions and tracing the patterns formed by their intersection and interweaving. Economic theorists focused almost exclusively on rational and self-interested transactions, seeing these egoistic and calculative orientations as fundamental to modern economic institutions. The wider social theories central to sociology, however, recognised that altruistic and habitual motives were also important and that an analysis of rational action could not provide a complete picture of social activity. They looked at the mechanisms of cooperative and communal interaction involved in the establishment of traditional and customary practices. In some cases, theories of action were proposed as complete alternatives to theories of social systems. All social phenomena, it was argued, are merely the outcome of individual action and must not be reified by according them properties that belong properly only to individuals. In other cases, action and system approaches were regarded as complementary ways of looking at complex social processes: if social systems could be analysed without reference to subjective actions, then those actions could, equally, be analysed without reference to the system processes except as external conditions.

The sixth theme that ran through formative theory was conflict and, in particular, the claim that social phenomena are the products, intended or unintended, of the competitive actions and struggles of groups. Individual competition had been recognised by the earlier writers, but the nineteenth-century theorists began to place far greater emphasis on group conflict. The most general forms of conflict theory saw groups as defined by their economic position, their 'race', or some other shared attribute, and as engaged in a constant process of competition, struggle, and alliance. The systemic properties of societies were seen as ever-changing outcomes of the shifting power balance among social groups. Some built conflict into an evolutionary approach and saw social change as the outcome of a struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest within a particular natural environment. These so-called 'social Darwinists' emphasised the part played by warfare and militarism in social development.

These themes run through the works of the various social theorists and were not generally pursued as exclusive 'schools' or 'traditions' of theory. Theoretical differences existed, but only occasionally did these crystallise into sharply differentiated and all-embracing intellectual frameworks.¹³ There were numerous areas of intellectual disagreement, with theorists specialising in or emphasising one particular theme to the exclusion of all others. There are numerous examples of the outright rejection of one approach by advocates of another. Such disagreements, however, took place within a common discourse. There was no monolithic consensus over intellectual issues, but there was a recognition of being involved in a common enterprise whose parameters were defined by these six themes. For many theorists there was an explicit recognition of their complementarity in the explanation of social activity.



Figure 2.1 *Themes in classical social theory*

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Comte was, undoubtedly, central to this formative theory. He gave the emerging discipline a name – not wholeheartedly embraced by all who contributed to it – and he provided a framework of analysis that found followers and adherents across the world. At around the same time, the British polymath Herbert Spencer produced an equally grand synthesis of knowledge that achieved an even greater global impact. Comte and Spencer were the first global sociologists and their work dominates the whole formative period in sociological thought.

Auguste Comte and Positivism

Originally secretary to Saint-Simon, Auguste Comte shared many of his ideas about the need for a positive philosophy and about its role in rational social change. He presented his own ideas in two key works. First was a treatise on scientific method (1830–42) that was freely translated into English by Harriet Martineau (1853) and established the need for a systematic social theory. Later came his outline of ‘positive politics’ (1851–4). His early work sketched the outlines of a ‘social physics’ that would complete the development of the sciences, and it was this that he later renamed ‘sociology’ to distinguish it from the social physics of Adolphe Quételet.

Each science, Comte argued, has its distinctive and irreducible objects of analysis, and those of sociology are social ‘organisms’. Human societies have organic properties quite distinct from those of the individual biological organisms that are their members. Human social life involves more than the mere coexistence of biological organisms found at the animal level. ‘Humanity’ differs from ‘animality’ because a ‘collective being’ is produced through linguistic communication. Animals have no language and so animal life involves no true ‘society’. Comte’s sociological method divided the study of these social organisms into social statics and social dynamics.

Social statics is described by analogy with the study of anatomical structure in biology. It concerns the coexistence and integration of interdependent elements in ‘social systems’ characterised by varying degrees of solidarity, harmony, and consensus. This system integration occurs, firstly, through work and property relations that relate people to the external world and through which they can meet their physical needs. However, material interdependence alone cannot generate solidarity, which Comte saw resulting from the sentiments of altruism and solidarity generated within families. Work and family relations, in turn, are regulated through the religious forms that give societies an overarching moral unity and sense of community. Coordinating the ‘social organs’ of work, family, and

religion is the political order of the state, which sustains belief and so indirectly regulates all social activities.

States also maintain the 'class' relations through which the various social groups acquire their particular role in society. The classes are the dominant social groups within particular spheres of activity and Comte identified three such collectivities, with their principal foci in the three subsystems of industry, religion, and family. A wealthy class, based in industry, is concerned with the production and organisation of material riches, while a priestly class, based in religion, is concerned with forms of intellectual expression. A class of women, based in the family, is concerned with the key social force of morality and emotional commitment.

Social dynamics is described by analogy with the study of physiology in biology. It concerns the 'life' of the organism: the movement and circulation of its parts, and their development over time. Comte followed the Ideologists in seeing European societies developing through a sequence of intellectual stages, identifying three principal stages characterised by their particular combination of religious ideas and political forms. The initial 'theological' stage, with its sub-stages of fetishistic, polytheistic, and monotheistic belief, was associated with the development from primitive societies to the feudal societies of Europe organised through the Catholic Church. This had eventually given way to a 'metaphysical' stage centred on a critical, 'negative', and philosophical challenge to traditional theology in the name of reason. The intellectual and political changes of this period – the Renaissance and the Enlightenment – laid the basis for a third stage in which reason became a positive force in industrial expansion and social reconstruction. Comte saw his own sociology contributing to the consolidation of this 'positive' stage through a recasting of religion on a positive basis. Sociology would provide the doctrine for the new religion and sociologists would be its priests. Renewed social solidarity would be the result.

Comte's ideas on social reform through a new 'religion of humanity' inspired a massive following and were carried forward after his death in France and abroad. Pierre Lafitte promoted and elaborated the cults, sacraments, and ceremonies that Comte had seen as means of social regeneration (see Comte 1852, 1856). Similar 'positivist' groups were formed outside France, the most important being established by Benjamin Constant and Miguel Lemos in Brazil, where a Positivist Church has survived until today. Richard Congreve founded the London Positivist Society, translated three of Comte's works (Comte 1852, 1855, 1856), and trained other promoters of Comte's ideas: John Bridges (translator of Comte 1848), Edward Beesley (translator of Comte 1844), and Frederic Harrison

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(1862). This group translated the *System of Positive Polity* in 1875–9 and produced a number of other works (Beesley 1868; Harrison 1877, 1918).

The more lasting intellectual legacy of Comte, however, was among those influenced by his earlier work on sociology as a positive science. Émile Littré undertook early work in medicine and lexicography, but from 1845 he produced a number of commentaries on Comte and his political project, building a ‘science of morals’ (Littré 1863, 1876). Similar ideas inspired the more independent work of Alfred Fouillé (discussed in the following chapter). Comte had a major influence on Russian émigrés associated with the Russian School of Advanced Social Studies in Paris. Evgeniy de Roberty (1881, 1904, 1908), for example, elaborated on Comte’s idea of social life as the collective mental results of communication and the growth of scientific rationalism in furthering social development. Roberty returned to Russia in 1904 and was assassinated in 1915. Also associated with the Russian School was the more independent Maksim Kovalevsky (see the discussion in Chapter 3).

In Britain, Comte had his main influence through Harriet Martineau’s (1853) condensed translation – which received Comte’s approval and was itself translated into French as an accessible primer. George Lewes (1853) published a shorter summary in the same year that Martineau’s book appeared, while Mill produced a more critical response (Mill 1865) that produced a response in Bridges (1866). Mill also produced an incomplete study of Saint-Simon and socialist ideas (1869). These translations and commentaries circulated widely in the United States, where Lester Ward (discussed in Chapter 3) produced his own distinctive elaboration of Comte’s ideas.

Herbert Spencer and Evolutionism

Comte’s sociology undoubtedly had a major influence on Herbert Spencer, who drew voraciously on contemporary scientific work and had been attracted by Comte’s advocacy of a social science. Spencer, however, was no Comtean: impressed by the advances made in geology and biology, he aimed to construct a comprehensive philosophy and scientific system of his own. In doing so, he popularised the idea of ‘evolution’, using this concept some years before Darwin (1859) published his own work on biological evolution. Spencer’s ‘synthetic philosophy’ appeared in serial publication over a period of thirty years and included a statement of general principles (1862) and principles of biology (1864–7), psychology (1870–2), sociology (1873–93), and ethics (1879–93). Spencer realised that he should have included a ‘Principles’ of physics and chemistry, but in an

uncharacteristically modest statement he held that this would have made the task too large for him to complete. The whole of the synthetic philosophy was given an authorised summary by his secretary, Howard Collins (1889). Spencer also published a short statement of scientific method (1873) and presented a mass of ethnographic data in his 'descriptive sociology'. Publication of the series of volumes on 'Descriptive Sociology' continued after his death with finances provided under the terms of his will.¹⁴

Spencer saw all phenomena, whether planetary systems, landscapes, animate organisms, minds, or societies, as combinations of matter. The inorganic, the organic, and the super-organic were progressively more complex forms of organisation of matter. Where organic phenomena consist of physically connected matter, super-organic – social – phenomena consist of communicatively connected matter. Human organisms use language to communicate emotion and information, and stable structures of interdependence can be sustained through a flow of communicative acts. These social structures have autonomous super-organic properties, distinct from those of organic entities and irreducible to the actions of individuals (1850).

Spencer saw societies as systems that maintain an equilibrium state, much as organisms do. The actions of individuals as they pursue their goals move super-organic systems into equilibrium or disequilibrium with respect to their natural environment and the biological and psychological characteristics of their members. Disequilibrium consists of strains and tensions that pressurise individuals to act in ways that adapt their society to its environment and so re-establish equilibrium. The tendency to adaptation, therefore, is the means through which social systems change, and Spencer described this adaptive change as 'evolution'.

Social evolution occurs through processes of 'integration' and 'differentiation'. Individuals and groups are integrated or 'compounded' through increasing coalescence. Small bands of hunter-gatherers become compounded into federations and then into the 'doubly compounded' civilisations of the ancient and classical world. The most complex societies are the 'triple compounded' civilisations and nations of the contemporary world. Differentiation is a process through which societies become more stratified and their parts more specialised. Typically, a 'ruling agency' is separated out from the body of the society, initially as a form of sexual stratification. In more compounded societies, sexual divisions have been combined with economic and political differences to form complex class structures. Societies also tend to differentiate into specialised systems, each concerned with particular functions. Spencer traced the differentiation of domestic, ceremonial, political, economic, ecclesiastical, professional, and industrial activities

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and their super-organic connection into larger functional systems or institutions that he called 'organs'. The principal organs that he discovered in comparative work were the 'sustaining system' (concerned with productive activities), the 'regulating system' (concerned with government and inter-societal relations), and a 'distributive system' that links them.

In complex agrarian civilisations, Spencer argued, the regulatory system predominates and they tend to be 'militant': they have centralised power structures and a sharp stratification between rulers and subordinates. In the more complex modern societies, on the other hand, the sustaining system predominates and they are 'industrial' in character: individual members are recognised as 'citizens' with rights that limit the power of central government and allow them to enter into contractual relations as employers and workers. The prevailing trend of social evolution, therefore, has been from militant to industrial societies.

Spencer's work was massively influential, both in Britain and beyond, and it was he who popularised the idea of organismic systems and the associated idea of social evolution. In Britain, the work of Leonard Hobhouse (discussed in Chapter 3) drew on Spencer but added a great deal to it, while William Sumner in the United States (also discussed in Chapter 3) remained closer to Spencer's own views. Evolutionary theories were pursued in Italy by Roberto Ardigò (1879a, 1879b; see also 1870, 1893) and his followers such as Icilio Vanni (1888), Francesco Cossentini, Eugenio Rignano, and Giuseppe Ferrari (1851), none of whom added anything significant to Spencer's theory. In Spain, Francisco Giner de la Rios (1899), Gumersindo de Azcárate (1881), and Adolfo Posada (1903, 1908) utilised Spencer's ideas. Most significant of these was Posada, who combined Spencer's organicism with an account of the formation of a sense of individual self. Spencer also had an influence outside Europe. The first foreign-language book to be translated into Japanese was Spencer's *Principles of Sociology*, translated by Noritake Koutaro in 1882.

Comte and Spencer epitomise the central achievements of sociology in the formative period, but their work did not exhaust the implications of the ideas raised by the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment theorists. They stimulated a much larger number of theorists who explored the complex set of themes that I have identified: cultural formation, systemic organisation, nature, conflict, interaction, and socialisation. Developing these themes, they produced numerous and frequently incompatible theories. Collectively, however, they built a broad conspectus of ideas that have continued to inform contemporary debates. Unlike Comte and Spencer, they did not all embrace the term 'sociology' or describe

themselves as 'sociologists'. Some developed their theories within Departments of Economics, Political Science, Geography, History, and Anthropology, while others had no university attachments and developed their ideas as 'amateurs' or as political activists. While Departments of Sociology have continued to nurture the production of general social theory, they have never had a monopoly of its production. It is for this reason that the terms 'sociology' and 'social theory' can, with some reservations, be used interchangeably. Disciplinary labels are rarely important as indicators of fundamental conceptual divisions, and the disciplinary affiliation of a social theorist is often quite fortuitous and arbitrary. Social theory is the most general term for this kind of intellectual understanding, and sociology has been the particular, but not exclusive, disciplinary basis for this theory. In what follows I try to recognise this multidisciplinary character of social theory.

NOTES

1. All the contextual and supporting references and citations to secondary sources for Chapters 2–6 have been put into endnotes so that the main text can make clearer the chronology of the theorists discussed.
2. Weber (1904–5) explored the development of the bourgeois outlook in his account of the pre-modern and modern forms of the capitalist spirit. His argument is discussed later in this book.
3. Von Martin (1932: 21).
4. Toulmin (2001). See also Shapin (1994).
5. Habermas (1985). See also Eisenstadt (2001).
6. See Camic (1983).
7. Tomalin (1974).
8. A much earlier commentary on education by Mary Astell (1694) had proposed its reform only so that women could make a better-informed decision to embrace their distinctive role within the family.
9. Coleridge lived from 1772 to 1834, Wordsworth from 1770 to 1850, Keats from 1795 to 1821, Shelley from 1792 to 1822, and Byron from 1788 to 1824. An important and often unacknowledged influence on Wordsworth and Coleridge was Wordsworth's sister Dorothy.
10. Hegel's *Philosophy of History* was compiled from lectures delivered between 1818 and 1831 and was published posthumously in 1837.
11. Baehr (2002), but see also How (1998).
12. Mirowski (1989) has usefully discussed the impact and continuing relevance of physical ideas in economic theory.

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13. The otherwise useful account of organicist, conflict, and action theories in Martindale (1961) unfortunately depicts these as coherent and unified 'schools' of thought. See also Collins (1994), which identifies systems, conflict, rational choice, and interactionist theories as distinct 'traditions' of theory.

14. See Rumney (1937). The circumstances surrounding Spencer's will are critically reviewed in Tillett (1939). See also Peel (1971) for a general overview of Spencer's life and work. Spencer gave his own account of his life in his autobiography (1904).
