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# Classical Social Theory and the Origins of Modern Sociology

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The object of this paper is both critical and constructive. The first section contains a critical account of some leading interpretations of the rise of modern sociology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe, concentrating primarily on Durkheim but referring also to Max Weber. I try to show that these interpretations, still very commonly held, have to be abandoned as *myths*. Like all myths, however, they contain a rational kernel, and in seeking to show what this might be, I indicate some lines of development which I consider to be important in sociology in the present day. Most characterizations of the current travails of social theory are concerned with issues of epistemology, that is, with problems of the sorts of "truth claims" that can be made in sociology. These matters, undeniably of pressing importance, are related to legacies from 19th-century social thought which we have to disavow. But there is another residue of the 19th century with which we have also to break: this is represented by what I call the *theory of industrial society*. An essential task facing contemporary social theory is that of reconciling a revised epistemology of social science with new frameworks for the analysis of the development of advanced societies.

My aims in this paper are both iconoclastic and constructive. An iconoclast, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a "breaker of images," "one who assails cherished beliefs." I begin by taking to task a series of widely held views, relating above all to Durkheim's writings, of the past development of social theory. These views, as I have tried to show elsewhere (Giddens 1972*b*), are *myths*; here I try not so much to shatter their images of the intellectual origins of sociology as to show that they are like reflections in a hall of distorting mirrors. I do not, however, propose to analyze the development of classical 19th- and early 20th-century social theory for its own sake alone, but wish to draw out some implications for problems of sociology today.

## SOME MYTHS IDENTIFIED

There are obviously many different interpretations of the rise of social theory from its origins in 19th-century Europe to the present day; the views and controversies they express cannot readily be compressed within any simple analytical scheme. But at least certain influential ones are in-

formed by a particular perspective which I call that of "the great divide." This is the idea that a fundamental watershed separates the prehistory of social theory, when it had not yet been disentangled from speculative philosophy or the philosophy of history, from its foundation as a distinctive and novel science of society. The most prominent of the cherished versions of this notion locates the great divide in the writings of certain European authors whose major works appeared between 1890 and 1920—especially in the writings of Durkheim and Weber, closely followed by those of Pareto, Michels, Simmel, and others. While it may be misleading to mention one particular secondary work developing this version of the great divide, since it represents an orthodoxy which crops up almost everywhere, it would be hard to dispute that Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), perhaps the most influential study of European social theory published in English over the last half century, has played the largest part in establishing it as an orthodoxy.

It has often been pointed out that in the above work only minimal reference is made to the writings of Marx and Engels, which are cursorily relegated to limbo. But of course Marxism has its own rendition of the great divide, offering a very different analysis of the ideas produced by the writers of the 1890–1920 generation. Like the version mentioned above, the Marxist view has been stated with varying degrees of sophistication. Essentially, however, it runs that the foundations for a science of society were established by Marx and Engels when they forsook the speculative philosophy of history, as represented by Hegel and Feuerbach. (Perhaps the most technically precise account of this nature is that offered by Althusser's [1969] thesis of the supposed "epistemological break" in Marx's intellectual career, which separates philosophy from science in the development of Marxism as a coherent body of thought.) While I do not, in this article, examine this sort of claim directly, I do discuss the view that considers the works of Durkheim, Weber, and their non-Marxist contemporaries to be a response to the challenge posed by Marxism or by revolutionary socialism more generally. In its more extreme guise, the Marxist version of the great divide provides a rationale for dismissing the ideas of the "bourgeois" writers of the 1890–1920 period as mere ideology. But, stated in subtler form, this kind of view holds that Marx's writings represent the great divide in the history of social thought because they are the axis about which the work of the subsequent generation of thinkers (and perhaps each later generation up to and including the present one) has turned. Such a perspective has been developed in a European context by Georg Lukács, Lucien Goldmann, and others, but has also found expression among certain recent American authors (see, e.g., Zeitlin 1968).

I want to show that each of these competing versions of the significance

of the 1890–1920 generation is mistaken and that the whole notion of the great divide as formulated by Parsons, and is a less sophisticated way by many others, is a myth. I do not suggest that major divides cannot be found in the history of social thought; nor indeed that there are no elements of truth in the accounts I shall analyze. But we must extract the rational kernel from its shell. Before specifying the elements of truth in the thesis of the great divide, I wish to discuss certain other notions about the history of European social thought which have been quite often closely associated with one or another account of the great divide, and which are particularly, though not exclusively, connected with Durkheim's writings: notions which also involve mythologies (Giddens 1972*b*, pp. 357–58).<sup>1</sup> They are:

1. *The myth of the problem of order.*—According to this idea, the work of some or even most of the outstanding non-Marxist authors of the 1890–1920 period (but especially that of Durkheim) can profitably be understood as being preoccupied with an abstract “problem of order” that was a residue of utilitarianism in social philosophy.

2. *The myth of the conservative origins of sociology.*—Although this theme has been developed in varying ways by different authors, it relies primarily upon the thesis that some, or most, of the principal intellectual perspectives in sociology today can be traced fairly directly to a group of early 19th-century authors who reacted against the changes resulting from two great revolutions in 18th-century Europe, the 1789 Revolution in France and the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

3. *The myth of schism.*—This in fact derives from attempts to effect a critique of the idea that a concern with the problem of order has played a vital role in the past development of social thought. According to this view, a preoccupation with order distinguishes only certain traditions in social theory; the history of social thought since the middle of the 19th century, it is supposed, can profitably be regarded as involving a persisting split between “order theory” (alternatively called “consensus” or “integration” theory) on the one side and “conflict” theory (sometimes referred to as “coercion” theory) on the other.

More qualifications are in order. Although these four sets of ideas—the myths of the great divide, the problem of order, the conservative

<sup>1</sup> For a long while the literature on Durkheim (in English, at least) was, with certain notable exceptions, considerably inferior in terms of the level of scholarship to that on Max Weber. But, in very recent years, a flood of new publications has corrected that imbalance. The following deserve particular mention: *Émile Durkheim: His Life and Work* (Lukes 1973), *Émile Durkheim: Sociologist and Philosopher* (LaCapra 1972), *Durkheim: Morality and Milieu* (Wallwork 1972), *Émile Durkheim on Morality and Society* (Bellah 1973), *The Sociology of Émile Durkheim* (Nisbet 1974), *Images of Society* (Poggi 1973), and “Classic on Classic: Parsons' Interpretation of Durkheim” (Pope 1973).

origins of sociology, and schism—have met with widespread acceptance, none of them has gone undisputed. Nor are they necessarily the most persuasive accounts that have been produced. I claim only that they have been sufficiently influential to be worth refuting. I do not attempt to trace out how far they have in fact become conventional wisdom, but address myself only to those authors (Parsons, Nisbet, and Dahrendorf) whose writings have been most important in advocating the views in question. Also, it would be wrong to say that the four myths provide a unitary perspective on the past or that the proponents of any one of them have necessarily sought to defend the others. Nisbet, for example, who has probably done most to foster the myth of the conservative origins of sociology, has specifically questioned that of the great divide.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless there are important points of connection. The thesis that the problem of order was one, or perhaps *the*, major issue through which the concerns of contemporary sociology were shaped bolsters both the conviction that these concerns are connected in some privileged way with “conservatism” and the belief that there is some definable historical counterpart to “order theory” that can properly be labeled “conflict theory.” Moreover, as I shall show subsequently, the myths of the problem of order and of conservatism, suitably interpreted, can provide ammunition for certain more naïve Marxist versions of the great divide.

#### THE PROBLEM OF ORDER

As a result of its frequent appearance in Parsons’s major works, “the problem of order” has become a catch-phrase in contemporary social theory. Introduced as an interpretative theme in *The Structure of Social Action*, it became firmly established as a key notion in Parsons’s subsequent elaboration of his own theory. Below I comment briefly upon the ambiguity of the concept of the problem of order in his later writings; for the moment I wish to examine only its formulation in *The Structure of Social Action*, where it was introduced in relation to Hobbes. The problem of order, according to Parsons, “in the sense in which Hobbes posed it, constitutes the most fundamental empirical difficulty of utilitarian thought” (Parsons 1937, p. 91). The rudiments of the “Hobbesian problem,” as Parsons presents it, are not difficult to express. In a state of nature, each man would be pitted against every other, in a “war of all against all”; Hobbes supposes that by forming a compact with a sovereign authority, men in society escape from this prospect of unremitting struggle. This formulation is essentially inadequate, however, because it rests upon

<sup>2</sup> *The Sociological Tradition* (Nisbet 1967) emphasizes the continuity of European social thought throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. See Parsons’s (1967) review of the work in which Nisbet is taken to task on just this point.

the assumption of social contract, as if actors at some point come to perceive that it is in their best interests to combine to recognize a sovereign authority. Inadequate though it may have been, Parsons says, it nevertheless was accepted unquestioningly as long as utilitarianism remained dominant in social philosophy, that is, until the late 19th century, when it was subjected to a massive reexamination and critique (above all in Durkheim's writings) in which the problem of order became of fundamental concern.<sup>3</sup>

On this basis Parsons incorporated into *The Structure of Social Action* and subsequent writings (see, e.g., Parsons 1960) an analysis of Durkheim's thought which has met with widespread acceptance. But this analysis, influential as it has been, is not an accurate representation of the main thrust of Durkheim's work (for more detailed discussion, see Giddens 1971a, pp. 65 ff.; 1972a, pp. 38–48). The textual evidence against the interpretation that Durkheim was concerned throughout his career with the "Hobbesian problem of order," as formulated by Parsons, is overwhelming. First of all, at a relatively early stage of his intellectual development, Durkheim specifically, though rather casually, dismissed the "Hobbesian problem" as being of no significance for sociology, saying that it depends upon a hypothetical state of affairs (man in a state of nature) which is of no interest to social theory, because it is wrongly posed in the first place (Durkheim 1964b, pp. 122–24). Second, Parsons's account is based upon a misleading identification of the residues of prior intellectual traditions which Durkheim sought to criticize. As Parsons makes clear, the problem of order is tied to the utilitarianism of Hobbes and his successors. Now utilitarianism, not as represented in Hobbes's work but in the considerably more sophisticated guise of the writings of Herbert Spencer, was only one of the polemical targets at which Durkheim aimed his critical salvos in the early part of his intellectual career. Parsons's account concentrates almost exclusively upon utilitarianism as Durkheim's critical foil; but just as important—perhaps more so, since it supplied the main underlying parameters of *The Division of Labour*—was the latter's critical response to German idealism, both the "holism" of Wundt and Schäffle and neo-Kantian philosophy. These schools of thought preoccupied Durkheim in his very first writings, and, as I have tried to show elsewhere, various important ideas appear in those writings which Parsons supposes that Durkheim only arrived at much later, as a consequence of his struggles with the problem of order (see Giddens 1970).

<sup>3</sup> It should be pointed out that Parsons also identified a second major trend in utilitarian theory, resting upon the postulate of the "natural identity of interests" of men in society, and associated with Locke rather than Hobbes; this later became of particular importance in classical economics.

*The Division of Labour* itself is treated by Parsons as an early, and radically flawed, disquisition upon the problem of order. Two consequences flow from this: First, the work is severed from Durkheim's subsequent writings, which are regarded as successive, and progressively more acceptable, attempts to resolve the problem of order, culminating in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*—by which time Durkheim is supposed to have made the full traverse from “positivism” to “idealism” (in the specific senses in which Parsons uses those terms). Second, *The Division of Labour* is exposed as hiding an essential, unresolved ambiguity. By showing that there is a “non-contractual element in contract,” Durkheim had, according to Parsons, demonstrated the inadequacy of the Hobbesian solution to the problem of order; but at the same time he had created a dilemma for himself, for where does the “non-contractual element” derive from if the progress of organic solidarity, in terms of which contractual relations are formed, *ipso facto* entails the disappearance of collective values?

I deal with the second point first, since it relates to what I have already said about the intellectual traditions of which Durkheim sought to effect a critique. There is no ambiguity in the argument of *The Division of Labour* if it is viewed, not as an analysis of the problem of order, but as an attempt to reconcile “individualism” (which from the beginning Durkheim disavowed in its original utilitarian form) with “holism,” on the basis of a critique of *both*. Durkheim sought to show—as he pointed out clearly enough in the preamble to the book—that the ideals of “individualism,” which set a premium upon the freedom and dignity of the individual, are themselves social products and therefore cannot, in the manner of utilitarianism, be treated as the premises of human society in general; and that, since these ideals are both the moral expression and the foundation of organic solidarity, they are not “pathological” (as many idealist writers had suggested) but, on the contrary, represent the incipient moral order of the future (Durkheim 1964a, pp. 41–44). This theme is further developed throughout Durkheim's writings.

It is true that there were important developments in Durkheim's work subsequent to *The Division of Labour*. One of the most significant was his discovery of the work of the English anthropologists which, together with that of Spencer and Gillen, prompted the researches culminating in *The Elementary Forms*. But although he came to have doubts about some of the views expressed in *The Division of Labour*,<sup>4</sup> Durkheim continued to regard the general form of the framework set out therein as valid (adding a famous preface to the second edition in 1902), and drew

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, the introductory comments in the preface to the second edition of *The Division of Labour*.

upon it extensively in his later writings and lecture courses. If the central place accorded the problem of order in Parsons's exposition of Durkheim's works is abandoned, it becomes clear that the latter's main preoccupation, which of course he shared with many of his contemporaries, was with the contrasts and continuities between "traditional" and "modern" societies. The theory developed in *The Elementary Forms* both elaborates upon the received idea of "mechanical solidarity" as it was originally set out and offers an account of the social sources of morality that is broad enough to include the emergent ideals of "moral individualism," as well as connecting them to traditional theism.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, concentration upon the problem of order as Durkheim's guiding problem leads Parsons to represent the former's work as becoming more and more dominated by the notion of moral consensus, which thus almost completely blanks out his parallel concern with institutional analysis and institutional change. The latter aspect of Durkheim's thought is, however, highly important, not least because it constitutes a major point of connection between it and socialism. Although consistently resistant to the claims of revolutionary socialism, especially Marxism, Durkheim was equally consistently sympathetic to reformist socialism and specifically embodied some of its principles in his own theory. According to him, the moral regeneration necessary for the transcendence of anomie could come about only through a process of profound institutional change. In *The Division of Labour* this process was discussed in terms of the "forced division of labour"; later Durkheim reshaped and expanded the idea as the theory of occupational groups (*corporations*) and the modern State. (For a further analysis, see Giddens 1971*b*.)

I assess below some further implications of the "problem of order"; for the moment it is sufficient to say that, far from supplying the guiding theme of Durkheim's sociology, it was not, in the terms in which Parsons formulates it, a problem for Durkheim at all. Since it was primarily on his interpretation of Durkheim's writings that Parsons rested his case for the significance of the problem of order in the evolution of modern social theory, we can make the further claim that that "problem of order" was not of particular importance in European social thought in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The implications of such a claim cannot be fully worked out without considering afresh the significance of utilitarian philosophy for the development of social thought in the 19th century, as I shall undertake to do, albeit briefly, later in the paper.

<sup>5</sup> Interesting glosses on this appear in passages of Durkheim's discussion of the development of educational systems in Europe from the Middle Ages to modern times (see Durkheim 1969).



THE MYTH OF CONSERVATISM

The notion that the origins of modern sociology are bound up in some special way with conservative ideology has been advanced by various authors, including von Hayek (1964), Salomon (1955), and, nearer to the present day, Robert Nisbet.<sup>6</sup> Here I concentrate on Nisbet's account, again taking Durkheim's works as the main basis of my discussion, since the thesis of the significance of conservatism seems initially to be particularly persuasive when applied to Durkheim's thought and has been taken up in this regard by other interpreters (see, e.g., Coser 1960). But I also refer briefly to the writings of Max Weber.

In *The Sociological Tradition*, Nisbet formulates a powerful and comprehensive interpretation of the rise of European social theory, focusing upon the key role played by conservatism, especially by the "counter-reaction" to the French Revolution as manifest in the doctrines of de Maistre, Bonald, and Chateaubriand. "Conservatism" here does not refer to directly political attitudes but to a series of major analytic concepts which, in Nisbet's view, became established as—and still remain—basic to the sociological tradition. As applied to the elucidation of Durkheim's thought, this is an altogether more subtle and interesting thesis than the one, occasionally expressed several decades ago, that Durkheim was a conservative in his immediate political attitudes and involvements (see Mitchell 1931). If there was ever any doubt about the matter, it rested upon ignorance. Durkheim's sympathies never lay with right-wing nationalism or with its philosophy, and his work was (rightly) regarded by conservative Catholic apologists as highly inimical to their interests.<sup>7</sup> Although he normally remained distant from the day-to-day events of politics, his affiliation was above all to liberal Republicanism (his influence upon Jaurès is well known); and he took an active role in support of the *dreyfusards*.

While acknowledging, then, Durkheim's liberalism in politics, Nisbet wishes to argue that nonetheless the main intellectual parameters of his social theory were formed through the adoption of a frame of concepts drawn from the conservative revolt against the legacy of the 18th-century rationalist philosophers whose ideas inspired the 1789 Revolution. This argument, however, can be taken in either of two possible ways, which are not separated by Nisbet. I call them the "weak" and the "strong" versions of the thesis of conservatism. We may, and ordinarily must, distinguish between the intellectual *antecedents* of a man's thought, the

<sup>6</sup> In mentioning these authors in the same breath as Nisbet, I do not, of course, wish to say that the burden of their message shares much in common with his.

<sup>7</sup> See the bitter attack upon Durkheim's theory in *Le Conflit de la morale et de la sociologie* (Deploige 1911).

traditions he draws upon in forming his views, and the intellectual *content* of his work, what he *makes* of the ideas he takes from the traditions. For a thinker may draw upon a specific range of sources but may sculpture from them an intellectual system quite different from that or those whence they derived. It is entirely possible for a corpus of work to be “conservative” in terms of the schools of thought on which it draws (the weak sense), without being “conservative” as such (the strong sense)—and vice versa. I argue, in fact, that Durkheim’s writings cannot be distinctively linked to conservatism in either sense. But I wish to make a further point which can be easily illustrated by reference to the works of other leading social theorists as well: that the work of any outstanding thinker—and this is what makes it outstanding—normally both *synthesizes*, yet also thereby significantly *breaks with*, several apparently divergent intellectual traditions. With regard to the three European thinkers of the 19th and early 20th centuries who did most to frame the development of social theory up to the present time—Marx, Durkheim, and Weber—conservatism, in some sense, appears as an important fragment of their intellectual inheritance. But all of them also sought to transcend what they saw as its particular limitations by synthesizing ideas drawn from it with ideas drawn from competing traditions.

I have already referred to Durkheim’s intellectual inheritance, from the point of view of utilitarianism, with regard to the myth of the problem of order. This is not, however, the main focus of Nisbet’s account, which concentrates upon Durkheim’s indebtedness to the luminaries of the “counter-reaction.” As the former expresses it: “It was Durkheim’s feat to translate into the hard methodology of science ideas and values that had first made their appearance in the polemics of Bonald, Maistre, Haller and others opposed to reason and rationalism” (Nisbet 1965, p. 25). I think this is quite easily shown to be wrong if it is understood as the weak version of the thesis of conservatism. It is not accurate to say, as Nisbet does, that Durkheim’s debt to the rationalism of the 18th-century *philosophes* was wholly a methodological one. Although he rejected major aspects of Rousseau’s theory of the State, for example, his critical evaluation of Rousseau’s philosophy was certainly not completely negative (see Durkheim 1960). It is evident enough, however, that within the spectrum of French social thought, the contributions of later authors, notably Saint-Simon and Comte, bulked larger on Durkheim’s intellectual horizons, and it is through indicating Durkheim’s debt to Comte that Nisbet seeks in substantial part to demonstrate the influence of the Catholic reactionary thinkers upon Durkheim’s writings. Now Comte acknowledged the importance of the “retrograde school,” and there is a clear imprint of the ideas of the latter in the hierocracy envisaged as the corporate society of the future in the *Positive Polity*. But Durkheim explicitly rejected the

basic features of this model; it was Comte's methodological writing, as manifest in the *Positive Philosophy*, which particularly influenced him (together with the more proximate influence of Boutroux). In evaluating and rejecting what he saw as the reactionary implications of the Comteian hierocratic model, Durkheim drew upon elements of the overlapping, yet distinctively different, analysis of the emergent society of the future foreseen by Comte's erstwhile mentor, Saint-Simon (while seeking to effect a critique of the latter also). This is of more than marginal interest, since Saint-Simon's works, inchoate and wild though they frequently were are vital in the development of 19th-century social theory. Two paths open out from them, one leading to Comte and Durkheim and thence to contemporary "structural-functionalism," the other leading to Marx.<sup>8</sup> I have already alluded to the significance of socialism in Durkheim's intellectual background. This was also mediated through his early exposure, during a period of study in Germany, to the ideas of the "socialists of the chair"; it was undoubtedly partly in response to their work that the underlying themes of *The Division of Labour* were elaborated (see Lukes 1973, pp. 86-95).

I conclude from this analysis that Durkheim's work was not conservative in the weak sense. But one further body of work from which he drew is worthy of mention and immediately relevant to the question whether Durkheim's writings may be regarded legitimately as conservative in the strong sense. This is neo-Kantianism, particularly as developed by Renouvier. One constantly finds Kantian formulations in Durkheim's works, often explicitly acknowledged as such by him. If there is any single problem with which Durkheim was preoccupied, rather than the "Hobbesian problem of order," it was the Kantian problem of the moral imperative. From the early stages of his intellectual career up to and including the publication of *The Elementary Forms*, he was concerned with reformulating some of the key concepts of Kant's philosophy in a social context, seeking to show that both the moral imperative and, in the above-mentioned work, the very categories of the mind, are not to be taken as a priori but, on the contrary, can and should be explained sociologically. In conjunction with the other intellectual emphases that I have mentioned previously, this fact supplies the essential interpretative background for understanding how misleading it is to regard Durkheim's thought as having an inherently conservative cast. For Durkheim was concerned to show, first, that the forms of "individualism" stressed in Kantian and in utilitarian philosophy were the products of an extended sequence of social evolution, rather than primitive and necessary assumptions of social analysis as such; and, second, that individualism is to be

<sup>8</sup> Gurvitch (1950) has argued the case for the influence of Saint-Simon over the subsequent evolution of Marxism.

the moral counterpart of the emerging differentiated society founded upon a diverse division of labor.

One of the main props of the thesis that Durkheim's thought is inherently conservative is that, as Nisbet puts it, it constituted an all-out offensive against individualism (Nisbet 1965, p. 28). But this view rests on a confusion of two senses of "individualism" between which it was precisely Durkheim's object to distinguish: *methodological* individualism and *moral* individualism. One important strand of his writing is a critique of those forms of method—especially utilitarianism—which treat the individual as the starting-point of sociological analysis. But he wished to show that the rejection of individualism as a methodology does not preclude analyzing the development of moral individualism sociologically—on the contrary, the latter process cannot be accomplished otherwise. The rise and significance of moral individualism cannot be understood via the ontological premises of methodological individualism. "The condemnation of individualism," Durkheim says, "has been facilitated by its confusion with the narrow utilitarianism and utilitarian egoism of Spencer and the economists. But this is very facile . . . what is unacceptable is that this individualism should be presented as the only one that there is, or ever could be. . . . A verbal similarity has made possible the belief that *individualism* necessarily resulted from individual, and thus egoistic, sentiments" (Durkheim 1898, pp. 7–8). I do not say that Durkheim's attempt to distinguish between methodological and moral individualism was successful; some of the principal difficulties with, and ambiguities in, his work derive from unresolved dilemmas in this respect.<sup>9</sup> But that it clearly distances his writings from conservatism cannot be disputed. The article from which the above quotation comes was written in relation to the Dreyfus affair specifically as an attack upon contemporary adherents of the sort of hierocratic reactionism prefigured in the writings of de Maistre and others in an earlier generation. In opposition to the conservative ideologists, Durkheim consistently argued that there can be no reversion to the sort of moral discipline that prevailed in former ages (which he sometimes referred to as the "tyranny of the group," and under which there is only a feeble development of individual faculties and capabilities): freedom does not result from escape from moral authority but from its transformation through the emergence of the values of moral individualism.

In *The Sociological Tradition* Nisbet differentiates between conservatism and two other "ideological currents" that helped shape European social thought in the 19th century, "radicalism" and "liberalism." He maintains that each of these also served to mold the thought of major thinkers of

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of some of the residual difficulties in Durkheim's view, see Giddens (1971c).

the period, for example, Marx (“radicalism”) and Mill and Spencer (“liberalism”). But as I seek to indicate below, if any such general labels are to be attached to them, Durkheim’s writings are distinctively connected to “liberalism”—although not of the utilitarian variety—rather than to “conservatism.” One of the main shortcomings of the thesis of the conservative origins of sociology is that “conservatism” means different things in different countries and at different periods, as do “liberalism” and “radicalism.” Thus it would seem reasonable to hold that *one* of the traditions that shaped Marx’s own writings was a conservative one, namely, Hegel’s philosophy. Similarly, in the accounts of various interpreters, Weber is held to have been a conservative—in the strong sense—because of an irrationalism that ties his thought to that of the ideologist of National Socialism Carl Schmitt (see in particular Lukács 1955 and Mommsen 1959). In actual fact, I do not think this view to be any less partial and inaccurate than that which links Durkheim’s writings in a privileged way to the “counter-reaction”; irrationalism, particularly in the form of Nietzsche’s ideas, is only one component of Weber’s intellectual inheritance and of his thought, and one which he tried to synthesize with other, quite different, elements and thereby to transcend (Giddens [1972*c*] argues the case for this in detail).

#### THE MYTH OF SCHISM

Although it is perhaps even more pervasive than the others, the myth of schism can be dealt with more briefly, because in some part it depends upon them. It was invented, to put the matter crudely, by Dahrendorf, looking back over his shoulder to Parsons’s “problem of order.” According to Dahrendorf (1959), not one, but two resolutions of the problem of order can be found in social theory. One is that which Parsons extracted from Durkheim, stressing the significance of consensus; the other, most clearly expressed by Marx, resolves the problem of order through the coercive control that a minority can exert over the rest of society.<sup>10</sup> Dahrendorf compares Marx directly to Parsons; others, however, have looked back to Durkheim as the main founder of “order theory.” Horton (1964, 1966), for example, traces the differences between Marx and Durkheim to divergent conceptions of man in a state of nature, linking Marx to Rousseau, and Durkheim once more to Hobbes. According to this sort of view, while in the first such conception the evils in the human condition stem from the repressive effects of man’s incorporation in society—from which he must be liberated—in the second they originate

<sup>10</sup> For a more recent and more interesting version of the idea of schism, see Dawe (1970).

in the opposite state of affairs: a lack of adequate social or moral regulation.

But it is easy to show how misleading this conception is. One cannot make sense of Marx's writings, even his early ones, by supposing that he was thinking in terms of an abstract contrast between "man in nature" (nonalienated, free) and "man in society" (alienated, unfree). Marx, like Durkheim, dismissed this as a residue of utilitarianism from the outset; both saw that the freeing of man from the limitations of his bondage to nature and from his own self-ignorance is a product of social development. Human faculties are both produced and sustained by society. Alienation is maximized by the specific mechanisms of the capitalist mode of production and is transcended, neither by the destruction of society nor by reversion to a more primitive way of life but by the transformation of society itself. Durkheim's vision was undoubtedly at odds with Marx's; the discrepancies do not derive, however, from two different versions of man in a state of nature but are anchored in divergent analyses of the development of a definite *form* of society due to the rise of industrial capitalism in Europe. For Durkheim, man in a state of nature would not be anomic because his needs, like those of animals, would then be wholly organic, and such needs are adjusted to fixed levels of satiation. It is precisely because most of man's needs are socially created that their limits, or their definition *as* bounded needs, must also be set by society. The correlate of this, obviously, is that the concept of anomie can only be properly understood, as Durkheim intended it to be, in the context of the destruction of traditional society and the emergence of moral individualism (see Giddens 1971*a*, pp. 224–32).

#### SOME IMPLICATIONS

It is time to take stock. In pouring cold water on the myths of the problem of order, conservatism, and schism, I have talked mainly of Durkheim. The analysis could readily be extended to other authors, however, and I want to deny that these ideas illuminate the development of European social theory in the 19th and early 20th centuries. On the contrary, I seek to indicate that the false images of the past which they have fostered have had an unhappy influence on the contemporary debate about the present concerns and aims of sociology (and the social sciences as a whole). There can be few who do not have a sense of unease about the current condition of social theory, and it is not hard to see that the social sciences today stand at a crossroads; the difficulty is to see which path or paths to take, amid the welter of apparently clashing theoretical perspectives that have suddenly sprung into prominence. I accept that we are today at an important stage of transition in social theory—our

own great divide, as it were. Within the confines of such a paper as this, it is not possible to draw up a detailed proposal about the likely or proper future orientations of sociology; but undermining the myths of the past can help to illuminate some of the major tasks of today.

Broadly speaking, within "academic sociology," as differentiated from "Marxism," we can distinguish at least three responses to the current *malaise* of social theory: (1) A resurgent critique of positivism in the social sciences and an attempt to rework their foundations so as to escape from its toils; (2) the argument that sociology is tied to ideologies which legitimate the status quo, and hence a call for a new *radical sociology*; (3) the thesis that in the schism between "order" and "conflict theory," the former has won out, and hence a demand for new attempts to develop conflict theory in a more adequate fashion.

I do not deny that certain advocates of one or another of these directions in social theory may have made valuable contributions. I do claim, however, that some recent versions—particularly within American sociology as distinct from European social theory and philosophy—are in some part tied to the three myths criticized above and share their inadequacies. I shall first discuss the latter two of the trends I have mentioned above, which I shall connect to what I want to call *the theory of industrial society*, and shall revert later to the problem of "positivism," which I shall connect to the myth of the great divide in the context of the *epistemological status of social theory*.

#### THE THEORY OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

I think it would be true to say that the myth of schism was originally fostered by critics whose attentions were directed at Parsons's mature theories, as set out principally in *The Social System*. These critics were mainly European (Dahrendorf, Lockwood, and Rex); although they themselves were not Marxists, they sought to complement Parsons's ideas with others supposedly drawn from Marxist thought. Even though they rejected the problem of order as *the* problem of sociology, they tended to accept it in a relatively unexamined way as *a* fundamental basis for social theory, claiming that it should be complemented with notions of coercion, power, and conflict (see Lockwood 1956, 1964 and Rex 1961). Now to deny that the idea of schism is of much value in illuminating the past development of social theory is not the same as showing that the "order" versus "conflict" dichotomy is not a useful way of formulating the tasks of social theory today (or that the idea, as a logical extension, that the dichotomy should be overcome by "combining" or "integrating" the two in some way is of no value). But I wish to make the extension and to claim that such is the case. The myth of schism not only rests upon

misleading interpretations of the past but also is a wholly inadequate way of conceiving our present tasks. This is so for two reasons. First, it perpetuates an ambiguity in the idea of the problem of order itself—a dual meaning which Parsons himself pointed out when he first introduced the notion in *The Structure of Social Action* but which, because of the standpoint he wished to elaborate there, he treated as of no significance. “Order” *can* refer, Parsons pointed out initially, to the antithesis of “randomness or chance,” where “chance or randomness is the name for that which is incomprehensible, not capable of intelligible analysis”—a very general sense of the term indeed. In Parsons’s formulation of the “Hobbesian problem of order,” on the other hand, the term “means that process takes place in conformity with the paths laid down in the normative system” (Parsons 1937, p. 91). By suggesting subsequently, however, that for purposes of social theory these two formulations of order may be treated as one and the same, Parsons was able to develop the view that the “Hobbesian problem” is the generic way in which “the problem of order” *has* to be presented in sociology. But this second sense of “order,” normative integration or consensus, is a very special use of the term; and it does indeed appear the contrary of “conflict,” “coercion,” etc. We have to recognize, in other words, that while, in the first, very general, sense no one could deny that the task of social theory is certainly to account for “order,” the Parsonian formulation is *one specific approach* to this—and it is one that can be questioned in a much more profound way than is suggested by the critics mentioned above.

Second, the idea of schism is a crude and unsatisfactory way of representing the issues separating “structural-functionalism” and “Marxism”; the views supposed to be derived from the latter (stressing the primacy of “conflict,” “coercion,” and “change”) are purely formal and actually have no particular connection with Marxism at all. Thus it is quite mistaken to suggest that Marx was unconcerned with normative “consensus,” although of course he disliked that specific term. “Common values” appear in Marxian theory in the guise of “ideology,” and what differentiates the latter concept from the former cannot be understood without reference to other concepts integral to Marxism, namely, those of modes of production and class interests. It is interesting to note that, although it originated in the writings of European authors, the idea of schism seems to have been more influential in American sociology subsequently than in Europe. One reason may be that, even though the bearing of conflict theory on Marxism is minimal, it has helped to supply in a somewhat covert way what is absent from the American intellectual scene but strongly developed in Europe: a vital and sophisticated tradition of Marxist thought itself.

The idea of schism is a sterile one and has to be abandoned. But because the call for a “radical sociology” is tied both to it and to the myth



of conservatism, it is appropriate to subject it to brief scrutiny. It is easy to see that, just as the notion that the chief focus of social theory should be the "problem of order" calls forth the demand that this focus should be complemented by an analysis bringing conflict, coercion, and change to the forefront, so the view that the roots of modern sociology are bound up in some special sense with conservatism tends to call forth the response that the conservative bias needs to be complemented by a "radical" one. Now it may well be the case that some schools of social thought show elements of conservatism in either the weak or the strong sense (although I have already indicated the difficulties involved in the use of blanket terms like "conservatism" or "radicalism"). But this type of argument is quite different from showing that sociology is in some *intrinsic* way bound up with conservative views. Even if the latter view could be shown to be plausible, which I do not believe it can, it would still leave the epistemological basis of "radical sociology" obscure. Marxism itself has always had trouble with its own epistemological status, that is, to what extent it is a neutral science and to what extent it is a critical theory linked to the interests of the labor movement, and those difficulties are surely only compounded by the diffusely expressed ideals of "radical sociology." I do not deny that social theory is linked in subtle and ramified ways to criticism, but only reject that sort of formulation of "radical sociology" which I consider tied to the myths I have sought to undermine (see Lindenfeld 1973).

I can now move to the main point of this section: the acceptance of these myths of the past has generated a series of controversies, involving attacks upon "structural-functionalism," which have concentrated almost solely upon its abstract or epistemological shortcomings. I refer to these again below. What I wish to show at present is that, since the debate has concentrated upon these issues, it has almost completely ignored what has been the substantive correlate of "structural-functionalism": *the theory of industrial society*. This type of theory is, I think, expressed in the writings of Parsons himself, but the view is also broadly shared by authors as diverse otherwise as Dahrendorf, Aron, and Clark Kerr.

Before I sketch in what I mean, some qualifications are once more in order. I do not wish to say that, even among non-Marxist authors, the ideas I describe immediately below have been without their critics, or that the alternative approach outlined subsequently has not already been partially anticipated by others. I do, however, want to suggest that the critics of the theory of industrial society have neither identified it exactly as I do nor connected the elements of their critiques to an alternative program.

The theory of industrial society runs roughly as follows: The fundamental contrast in the modern world, it is held, is between traditional,

agrarian society, normally based upon the dominance of land-owning elites, sanctioned by religion, though in reality often deriving from military power and coordinated within an authoritarian state; and industrial, urban society, fluid and "meritocratic" in its structure, characterized by a diffusion of power among competitive elites, in which social solidarity is based upon secular exchange transactions rather than upon religious ethics or coercive military power, and in which government is transformed into a mass democratic state. The theory of industrial society recognizes the phenomenon of class conflict but holds that it is characteristic of the *transitional* phase in the emergence of industrialism out of traditional society and that it becomes transcended (read "regulated" or "institutionalized") when the industrial order reaches maturity. In some versions—including the original Saint-Simonian one—it is held that the very concept of "class" loses its relevance once the transition to industrialism has been achieved. Further, an end of class conflict in the contemporary era means an end of ideology, save in a few industrialized countries, such as France or Italy, where the continuing existence of an archaic, peasant sector means that the old class conflicts and ideological movements have not yet dropped away. Conceptually, the theory of industrial society involves a polar typology of forms of societal organization made familiar under a variety of names: "status" versus "contract," "mechanical" versus "organic" solidarity, "*Gemeinschaft*" versus "*Gesellschaft*," and so forth.

The theory of industrial society, as it has come down to us today, must be *abandoned*, or at least *dismantled* and its assumptions and premises subjected to scrutiny. Insofar as we apply it, in some guise or another, to the patterns of development of the industrialized societies in the present, we are operating within the sorts of assumptions made by most of those in the classic tradition of social theory when they sought to encompass theoretically the encounter of the post-feudal world with the coruscating influences of political democracy, urbanism, and industrialization. But some or most of these assumptions are obsolete in an era when the main "internal" divisions and strains in the advanced societies are no longer, as in the 19th and early 20th centuries, based upon the tensions between urban-industrial centers and the still strong centrifugal pull of a rural hinterland. Moreover, and just as important, the theory of industrial society is time-bound within certain characteristic intellectual biases of 19th-century social thought. The most important of these is an *anti-political* bias (see Wolin 1960). Throughout the 19th century one can trace the imprint of the view, or the covert assumption, that the State is subordinate to society, and that consequently politics can be explained, or, more accurately, explained away, by reference to more deeply layered social phenomena. This, to borrow one of Marx's phrases, was the "illu-

sion of the epoch," reflecting an optimism about the pacific and consensual implications of industrialism, as contrasted with "military" feudalism, questioned only by the few (including, most notably, Max Weber)—and shared in no small degree by Marx himself. The affinities between Marxism and orthodox sociology on this point have been obscured by the tendency to compare them on the abstract level of "conflict" and "order" theory. The threefold scheme of feudalism-capitalism-socialism certainly differs in a fundamental way from the traditional society-industrial society dichotomy, which treats capitalism not as a distinctive type of society but, for reasons already mentioned, as merely a transitional phase between the two main types (thereby precluding the possibility of the transformation of society through socialism, which is treated as of the past rather than of the future). But this should not be allowed to divert attention from the fact that in Marx's writings, as in the theory of industrial society, there is only a rudimentary and highly inadequate theory of the State, no theory of military power, and no anticipation of the resurgent nationalism which, not many years after Marx's death, was to ruin the hopes of socialists for an international socialist commonwealth.

From the assumption of the impotence of politics, shared by the theory of industrial society and by Marxism, other assumptions flow which must be questioned radically, as indeed they have been by a diversity of authors, in spite of whom their influence remains dominant. These assumptions are:

1. Social development or change can be conceived of above all as the unfolding of endogenous influences within a given society (or, more often, a type of society); external factors are then treated merely as an environment to which the society "adapts." But society has *never* been the isolated, "internally unfolding" system which this abstract model implies. This lesson should hardly need teaching in the contemporary world, with its intimate and intricate interdependencies and tensions spanning the globe. Were it not for the dominance of the endogenous model in sociology, one would not need to emphasize the extent to which politico-military power has shaped the character of the advanced societies. Successive world wars have brought about what internal industrial development failed to achieve in Germany and Japan—the disintegration of the hegemony of traditional land-owning elites. They have also provided the theater for the processes of political change which created state socialism, first in the Soviet Union, and then in the other societies of Eastern Europe.
2. The characteristic nature of any society is primarily (read "ultimately") governed by its level of technological or economic development; specifically, in the theory of industrial society, by the level of maturity of industrialization.
3. Consequently, the most economically advanced society (however

defined) in the world at any one point in time shows to other societies an image of their own future. As Marx wrote to those of his countrymen who might doubt that the analysis of *Capital* might apply to them, based as it was upon the most industrially advanced society of the time, Britain: "*De te fabula narratur!*" (it is of you that the story is told!). In the closing part of the 20th century, it might appear somewhat curious to take Britain as offering to the industrialized world an image of its future. But the underlying idea is alive and well: today it is trends in the United States which are most often taken—by non-Marxist thinkers, however—as demonstrating the future in the present for the rest of the world.

A breaking away from these stale ideas, the residue of the 19th century, offers prospects of exciting new perspectives and constitutes one of the immanent tasks of social theory in the present day. The need for substantial rethinking is, I think, evident in the rash of speculative ideas suggesting that we are in the throes of a major process of social transformation in the industrialized world: theories of "post-industrial," "post-modern," "technotronic" society, and so forth, abound. By and large, however, such theories continue the assumptions of previous times, holding, for instance, that "industrial society" is in the process of being superseded by "post-industrial society" (a process which, it is suggested, has proceeded very far only in the United States!). I wish to propose that our rethinking must be more profound and must break with the covert assumptions I have previously mentioned. This, I believe, implies a whole new theoretical and research program for sociology, informed by the following presuppositions:

1. The differentiation between sociology (as the study of social structure) and political science (as the study of government or political power) which has grown up over the years and become institutionally sanctified should be abandoned. It should be one of the major tasks of sociology to create a theory of the modern State and to explore its significance for problems of social theory in general.
2. Sociology should come to terms theoretically with the unitary yet diverse international community which is a "global community" in a literal sense: a world in which the industrial and political transformations of 19th-century Europe have become transferred to the international plane in the confrontation of rich and poor nations.
3. We should take seriously and explore the possibilities inherent in the idea that there are differing "paths" of development among the industrialized countries which cannot be squeezed between the confines of the old theory of industrial society. It has been shown and is generally recognized that there are differing paths to industrialization. In addition, however, these possibly establish differing, chronic patterns of industrial and political organization within the general type of "industrial society"

(I have tried to develop this line of reasoning in Giddens [1973]). We should neither leave the exploration of *differences* between societies to the historian nor merely explain them away by some idea of developmental lag.

4. We should abandon the practice, which would in any case scarcely be defended by anyone in principle, of constructing theories of development on the basis of single cases (Britain in the 19th century, the United States in the 20th). This is a clarion call for a *revitalized comparative sociology of the advanced societies*.

#### THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL STATUS OF SOCIAL THEORY

There is an apparent contradiction in what I have said so far. Although I have accentuated that we are in the middle of a major phase of transition in social theory, I have also argued that the idea of a "great divide" in the development of social thought in the 19th century is a myth. In concluding, therefore, it is necessary to clarify the argument. To do so, however, I must first examine the principal versions of the great divide as they are conventionally advanced; I again refer principally to Durkheim and secondarily to Weber, since no other thinkers of the 1890–1920 period have exerted a comparable influence upon the later development of sociology.

We might well have some initial skepticism about the notion of the great divide if we consider the frequency with which the claim has been advanced in the past that in the study of society science has finally triumphed over philosophy. After all, Saint-Simon made this claim of his works as compared with those of the earlier 18th-century philosophers; Comte and Marx made the same claim in relation to Saint-Simon; Durkheim and Weber made it concerning Comte and Marx; and Parsons made it, one might go on to say, concerning Durkheim, Weber, and their generation! But let us look again briefly at Durkheim's writings. Durkheim is frequently seen, especially by American sociologists, as the leading figure involved in laying the foundations of empirical social science, the first author to apply systematic empirical method to definite sociological issues. This is held to be particularly manifest in *Suicide*, which is often regarded as the first statistical and empirical monograph of its kind to be published.<sup>11</sup> But such a view is simply wrong, and is held in ignorance of the prior history of empirical research, in this area especially, but in other areas too, in the 19th century. The idea of developing a "social physics" (Comte's term also, until he coined the neologism "sociology") involving the sys-

<sup>11</sup> Thus Henry and Short (1957, p. 58) write: "Sociological study of suicide began in a systematic fashion with the publication of Émile Durkheim's *Le Suicide* in 1897. Durkheim's was the first theoretical and empirical exploration of the persistent variations of suicide in relation to sociological variables."

tematic use of "moral statistics" in order to study social life in a supposedly "objective" fashion dates back at least as far as Quetelet. Most of the generalizations, in fact, whereby Durkheim sought to relate variations in suicide rates to social factors were in no way original, nor was there anything particularly novel in his statistical methods (see Giddens [1964] for a fuller discussion). The distinctive character of Durkheim's work, in other words, did not lie in his method or materials but in his theories; and these were worked out within the context of, and can only be fully evaluated against the background of, the broad spectrum of issues which occupied him in *The Division of Labour* and other writings.

Now it is true that, in his methodological writings, Durkheim often emphasized the slow and partial way in which scientific progress comes about; and his efforts to define precisely the scope of the subject matter of sociology had as their object the achievement of the break with philosophy that writers such as Comte and Spencer had advocated but, as he saw it, had failed to bring about. But we can no more accept Durkheim's programmatic statements at their face value than he did those of the authors he took to task. We might admit that *Suicide* conforms to the methodological prescription that sociology should concern itself with restricted, clearly delimited problems; we should perhaps have more difficulty in reconciling this with the far-reaching claims made in *The Elementary Forms*, even though that work is based upon an intensive study of one particular form of "religion," Australian totemism. But the distance between methodological prescription and the themes actually developed by Durkheim surely becomes embarrassingly wide when we consider *The Division of Labour*. If it is not actually a philosophy of history, it is nonetheless of a sweeping and all-embracing character that is by no means alien to the sort of evolutionary schemes produced by previous 19th-century thinkers. Much of what Durkheim wrote in his work as a whole, in fact, hovers over that ill-defined borderline between moral philosophy and social theory. To be sure, he tried to show that age-old philosophical questions could be seen in a new light and thereby transformed; but this, after all, is no more than was claimed by many of his predecessors, including both Comte and Marx.

I shall not deal in detail with the technically elaborate version of the great divide set out in Parsons's *The Structure of Social Action*; some of my earlier comments obviously bear directly upon it. The Parsonian account of the unacknowledged "convergence" of ideas in the thought of Durkheim and Weber (and others whose writings are discussed in the book) has little plausibility, if at any rate it is read as any sort of historical interpretation rather than as a documentation of Parsons's own formulae for the future development of social theory. Durkheim's methodological ideas, as I have already mentioned, are in direct line of

descent from the *Positive Philosophy*, however critical he was of Comte in other ways. Weber had no such immediately available tradition and would certainly have rejected much of it, as he did the views of Menger within economic theory; his methodological position represents an uneasy and brittle synthesis of the sort of views espoused by the latter and the anti-generalism of the Historical School. For Weber, sociology always remained in an important sense the handmaiden of historical analysis. The Durkheimian version of sociological method would have been abhorrent to Weber, and since we can be fairly sure that Weber was well acquainted with the works of Durkheim and some of his prominent disciples, it is reasonable to suspect that Weber's tirade against the use of "holistic" concepts in social analysis was directed in some part against the *Année sociologique* school, although no specific reference is made to that school. In order to explain the divergencies as well as the parallels between the writings of Durkheim and Weber, we have to look at the socio-political background of their writings, conspicuously absent from *The Structure of Social Action*, but figuring prominently in Marxist or Marxist-inspired versions of the great divide, to which I now turn.

The cruder variants of the latter are scarcely worth bothering with. The dismissal of the writings of the 1890–1920 generation of thinkers as merely an "ideological defence of bourgeois society" is inconsistent with Marx's own method: for him, if bourgeois political economy was "ideological," it nonetheless contained a good deal that was valid, which he wrote into *Capital* and made the cornerstone of his own economic theories. But that version of the thesis which sees "sociology"—in the shape of the writings of Durkheim, Weber, and their generation—as having been formed out of a massive confrontation with Marxism is less easily shrugged aside. Thus Zeitlin has lodged the claim that "the outstanding sociologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries developed their theories by taking account of, and coming to terms with the intellectual challenge of Marxism." Some (like Weber) "adopted a reconstructed or revised version of 'Marxism,'" while others (like Durkheim) "sought to mediate between Marxism and other systems of thought" (Zeitlin 1968, p. 321). I think this claim is wrong: first, it was not just Marxism which played a key role in this respect but socialism more generally, both reformist and revolutionary; second, Marxism was influential not just as an "intellectual challenge" but also as an active political challenge in the form of the rise of militant labor movements toward the end of the 19th century; and third, there was another fundamental intellectual and political challenge which occupied Durkheim, Weber, and others of their time—that deriving from ultranationalistic conservatism.

By means of the third point, we can start to sort out the elements of validity in the myth of the conservative origins of sociology. The "con-

servatism” of Bonald and his contemporaries in France was first and foremost a response to the aftermath of the events of 1789 and the political philosophy that had inspired them. In France, throughout the 19th century, including the period at which Durkheim came to maturity, social thought continued to be dominated by the legacy of 1789, which was manifest in a succession of revolutionary outbreaks culminating in the Paris Commune almost 100 years later. Now the 1789 Revolution sent shock waves through the complacency of ruling groups in Germany and Britain, and provided the backdrop to Hegel’s philosophy in the former country. But although the fear of revolution (later, in Germany at least, concentrated against the specter of Marxism) continued to haunt the dominant elites in those countries for decades, other trends of development separated them quite decisively from the French experience. In Britain, the burgeoning of industrialism took place within the context of a mutual accommodation and interpenetration of landed aristocracy and ascendant commercial and industrial leaders that was unmatched elsewhere. This relatively even tenor of development, disturbed only briefly by Chartism, produced a society which gave rise neither to a large-scale socialist movement of a revolutionary kind nor to its counterpart, an aggressive theocratic or irrationalist conservatism. Nor, significantly, did that society produce a global sociology comparable to that of Durkheim, Weber, and their contemporaries (see Anderson 1969). Spencer’s formulation of the principles of sociology did not break significantly with utilitarianism, and the latter remained the dominant form of social theory in Britain throughout the 19th century. But, even in the guise of political economy, utilitarianism never enjoyed a similar preeminence in France and Germany. In the former it was overshadowed by the writings of the 18th-century *philosophes* and the reaction to them. In Germany the strongly historical and speculative bent in social philosophy and economics blunted its impact. “Conservatism” in Germany meant primarily a nostalgic and romantic attachment to an idealized village community; its French counterpart, by contrast, was always linked to Catholicism and to the claims of embattled but militantly tenacious landowners, rentiers, and independent peasantry. While for German thinkers of Max Weber’s generation the overwhelming problem was that of the antecedents and consequences of capitalism (analyzed above all in terms of the destruction of traditionalism by technical rationalization), in France the comparable debate centered upon the fate of the ideals of individualism for which the revolution had been fought, in the face of the continuing assaults of the Catholic hierarchy.

Both conservatism and socialism thus figure in the political and intellectual backgrounds of both Durkheim and Weber. In this regard, the work of each is an attempt *to rethink the foundations of liberalism in conditions in which liberal individualism and its base in social theory,*



*namely, utilitarian philosophy, developed in the British situation, were manifestly inappropriate.* But this very task helped to distance the main themes of their writings from one another. Weber worked against the backdrop not of a successful revolution (1789) but of a failed one (1848) and in the shadow of Bismarck's unification of the German state through military triumph. The rapid period of industrialization from the top which ensued took place in social and political circumstances very different from those in France. Durkheim's *Division of Labour* and the theory of the state which he later elaborated were directed toward resolving the "legacy of the Revolution" as he saw it: the distance between the ideals of freedom and equality heralded in 1789, and the reality of social stagnation and resistance to change which he thought were epitomized by the disasters of the war of 1870—the very war which sealed German unity—and by the repression of the Commune. Durkheim, like Weber, sought to borrow elements from socialism (and Marxian socialism was more prominent in Weber's intellectual horizon during the formative years of his career than in Durkheim's) and conservatism, but in order to transcend both.

In making these points, I do not want to fall into the sort of view, which I have already rejected, that sees the validity or usefulness of social theories as dependent upon the context in which they are produced, but simply to claim that such analysis helps us to understand more fully the theories and their distinctive qualities. The writings of the 1890–1920 generation *did* differ from much of what went before; but the elements which in a very general way exemplify the contrast do not accord either with Parsons's account or with the more naive versions of the great divide between social philosophy and social science. What, then, does distinguish the writings of the above-mentioned generation from what went before?

First, as I have already tried to show, an attempt to rethink the foundations of liberalism in the face of the twin challenge of revolutionary socialism and conservatism. Second, the successful beginning of sociology as an accepted subject in the university curriculum (one should remember, however, that Durkheim first came to Paris as a professor of education and that Weber never occupied a chair whose title included "sociology"). Third, a greatly heightened sensitivity to the study of other cultures and a breaking away from European ethnocentrism. Fourth, and not unconnected with the third point, a general resurgence of concern with the sources of unreason in human social existence (see Hughes 1958).

These factors helped to give the writings of Durkheim, Weber, and some of their more prominent contemporaries an intellectual power well beyond those of most of their predecessors in social theory. I do not deny that such intellectual advance is possible; but I do think it pressing to spell out some of the implications of acceptance of the myth of the great divide in the writings of some of the recent critics of positivism in sociol-

ogy. Such a task cannot be successfully executed unless it is, first, philosophically informed and, second, aimed at the right polemical foils. Neither condition is adequately met in much recent writing on these matters, especially by American authors. This is in some part, I think, precisely because they themselves attribute a fairly naive version of the great divide to their opponents; and when they knock it down, they are merely crushing men of straw.<sup>12</sup> The problem of positivism in social science is a complex one, and my remarks here must be cursory. The term "positivism" has become in most quarters more of a derogatory epithet than one with a precise reference (see Giddens 1974). I take it, however, to have at least two connotations: the empiricist notion that there exists a neutral or theory-free observation language, in terms of which observations of objects or events can be made and generalizations inductively established, and the thesis that such a model, derived initially from natural science, is appropriate for the study of social phenomena, so that we may consider sociology a "natural science of society." A good deal of social thought, especially in the United States, has been dominated by this sort of view; and it is, I consider, a view which has to be rejected.

Rejection of it is certainly going to involve a fundamental reappraisal of social theory, its pretensions and achievements. Social science as we know it today, I believe, was brought into being not primarily by the 1890–1920 generation but by that earlier generation of 19th-century thinkers among whom Marx, Comte, and Spencer may be distinguished as most prominent. They, more than anyone else, gave modern social theory its impetus under the impact of the rise of physical science. Sociology was created as an apparently direct extension of the realm of natural science which, beginning with mathematics and classical dynamics, had marched through the theory of evolution up to the gates of the human world itself; Comte gave this vision its most immediate expression in his formula of the historical sequence of scientific development, whereby science begins as applied to phenomena most remote from man's involvement and control but is brought ever nearer to man himself, culminating in sociology, the science of human social conduct. The modern philosophy of science, stimulated by a revolution in that bastion of classical physics, Newtonian mechanics, has radically overturned the view of natural science which inspired the rise of sociology. The implications for social science have yet to be worked out. They constitute a background to the recent attempts of English-speaking authors to follow Scheler, Schutz, and Sartre in trying to marry ideas drawn from phenomenology to those current in the more orthodox traditions of sociology, together with a resurgence of

<sup>12</sup> See Jack D. Douglas's account of "absolutist sociologies" in Douglas (1971, pp. 3 ff.), which completely ignores the works of 19th-century European thinkers whose ideas contrast with those of Durkheim.

interest in critical theory. From this seeming turmoil, I think, new forms of social theory will be born. But what is crucial is that they should not be allowed to foster a *retreat from institutional analysis*; that is to say, the abandonment of the classic concern of social theory with issues of macroscopic social organization and social change. For herein lies the greatest challenge to those who would undertake a rethinking of the major tasks of social theory today: to break with the classical traditions in a dual way, substantively on the level of the theory of industrial society, and abstractly on the level of epistemology.

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