The Enlightenment and the development of social theory

This chapter and Chapter 2 offer historical overviews of the themes that have emerged in the development of social theory in order to situate current ideas in terms of their past influences. At the same time it is noted that an injustice will be committed if the reader simply concludes that the writings of ‘past’ social theorists are not still of importance in understanding contemporary times.

It follows that in situating social theory according to the context of its production, theorists are not viewed as disembodied from their theories, but implicated in their production through addressing the problematics of their own historical times (Harrington 2005). Second, the works of these thinkers have not only acted as catalysts for current thought, but also structured its agenda. Their works enable theoretical discourse by operating to ‘fix’ prior debates which then facilitate theoretical discussion without recourse to continual elaboration, one such example being works on capitalism. These will either explicitly refer to, or be compared with, Karl Marx’s (1818–83) original analysis which represents the most systematic critical account of the genesis and consequences of this form of organizing social relations.

The Enlightenment may be characterized as a catalyst for the development of particular styles of social thought. It does not represent a set of ideas which can be clearly demarcated, extracted and presented as a list of essential definitions, but represents a general shift in thought:

In its simplest sense the Enlightenment was the creation of a new framework of ideas about man, society and nature, which challenged existing conceptions rooted in a traditional world-view, dominated by Christianity.

(Hamilton 1992: 23)

These ideas, when fused with governmental practice, produced some core themes. First, a concept of freedom based upon an autonomous human
subject who is capable of acting in a conscious manner. Second, the pursuit of a universal and foundational ‘truth’ gained through a correspondence of ideas with social and physical reality. Third, a belief in the natural sciences as the correct model for thinking about the social and natural world over, for example, theology and metaphysics. Fourth, the accumulation of systematic knowledge within the progressive unfolding of history. Collectively, these changes acted as catalysts and/or informed the scientific study of human societies. Therefore, it follows that they need to be considered in more detail before moving on to examine the development of social theory in differing contexts. For this purpose, there follows a brief examination of these cultural transformations and philosophical ideas.

The power and relevance of these cultural shifts cannot be underestimated in their effects upon modern times:

I believe that we are all to a greater or lesser extent children of the Enlightenment, and that it is from this standpoint that civilized members of Western society – the heirs to a humane tradition more than two centuries old – almost necessarily judge the political and social movements of their own time.

(S. H. Hughes 1979: 27)

Even postmodernists, who challenge the dominance and assumptions of modernism, are forced to engage with it for it permeates our contemporary ideas and practices. To paraphrase Marshall Berman (1993), we cannot ignore or turn away from it, for it is the only world that we have. This is the world which became an object of inquiry for the social sciences. Emerging modes of political practice, however, contained within them both positive and negative elements.

In negative terms, the Western Intellectual Tradition (Bronowski and Mazlish 1970) may be characterized as one which invokes assumptions which are assumed to be applicable to all societies, or through which ‘other’ people may be evaluated according to its dominant intellectual, political, social and economic standards. Coupled with this, the idea of modernity evokes the development of capitalism and industrialization, as well as the establishment of nation states and the growth of regional disparities in the world system (B. S. Turner 2006). The period has witnessed a host of social and cultural transformations. Indeed, William Du Bois, an American social theorist, recognized this double-edge to its force and for this reason worked towards a multicultural social theory which would not exclude whole groups of people via its unexamined assumptions (Du Bois 1989).

In general terms, battle lines have now been drawn between the defenders of the project of modernity or enlightenment (Habermas 1992a), its detractors (Baudrillard 2005; Lemert 2006; Lyotard 1984; Seidman 2001) and those thinkers who, through their historical and philosophical excava-
tions, have questioned the comfortable certitudes upon which modern practices and ideas have based themselves (Derrida 1978; Foucault 1992). In the following history of social theory, we will also find those thinkers who regarded modernity as an opportunity (Comte, Marx and Durkheim) and those who were more ambivalent in their evaluations (Montesquieu, Weber and Simmel).

When did these changes start? We cannot state a time at which the Enlightenment and what has been called ‘the modern age’ or ‘modernity’ began:

How old is modernity? is a contentious question. There is no agreement on dating. There is no consensus on what is to be dated. And once the effort of dating starts in earnest, the object itself begins to disappear.

(Bauman 1991: 3).

We still need some idea of its genesis. These broad changes have been examined in two ways. First, through the history of ideas, and second, through examining transformations in social practices. In terms of the former, Kroker and Cook (1988) have travelled back to the work of the theologian Augustine, who they describe as ‘the Columbus of modern experience’ (1988: 37). They argue that modernity is characterized as the search for a theory of representation whereby it becomes possible to explain a variety of human experiences in different contexts. Augustine placed this in question:

To suggest a historical thesis, it is our position that Augustine was the first postmodern thinker. ... Refusing the alternatives of rationalism and materialism, or tragic idealism and dogmatic skepticism, Augustine demonstrated the fatal flaw in enlightenment modernism: its absence of a directly experienced creative principle which could serve to unify the warring tendencies in Western experience. ... When enlightenment returns in the seventeenth century, it reawakens the fatal flaw in Western metaphysics, and thus experience, which Augustine had laid to rest for a period of eleven centuries.

(Kroker and Cook 1988: 28)

In terms of social practices Toynbee (1954) saw the emergence of a modern age in the ways of life of European people on the Atlantic coast in the fifteenth century, while Stephen Toulmin (1990, 2003) regards it as a shift from an understanding of ‘argumentation’ in Renaissance humanism, towards a concern with ‘proofs’ and universal logic. Marshall (1994) argues that there are three historical periods to modernity, the first being from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the second being with the French Revolu-
tion and the accompanying rapid changes in social and political life and the
third giving rise to a ‘world culture of modernism’ with its growing turmoil
and uncertainty.

Shifting this emphasis towards the experiential aspects of modernity
has witnessed one nineteenth-century writer describing it as ‘ephemeral,
fugitive, contingent’ (Baudelaire quoted in D. Sayer 1991: 9). This continues
into the twentieth century with Michel Foucault (1926–84) describing it as
more of an ‘attitude’ which informs practices, rather than any actual period
of history:

And by ‘attitude’, I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality:
a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of
thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one
and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself
as a task.

(Foucault 1984: 39)

This experiential focus also permits a comparison between ‘discontinuities’
in contemporary social institutions and their effects on daily lives, with
traditional social orders which are seen to have represented both stability
and continuity (Giddens 1990; Stones 2005).

In these attempts to pinpoint a meaning for and genesis of modernity,
one of the central characteristics of the debate appears to be ‘the extent to
which key terms have evaded clarification’ (Smart 1990: 16). Nevertheless,
there remains a relationship between emerging ideas in this period and the
development of social thought.

Catalysts to the Enlightenment project

The journey begins with Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Kant added power to
the search for a universal truth through his inheritance of two philosophical
traditions: rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism was represented by the
work of René Descartes (1596–1650).

Using a method of doubt, Descartes asked how it is that people ‘know’
that the knowledge they possess is true? After all, people disagree over
experiencing the same thing: to one person a plate may be hot, to another
only warm. Further, it is often difficult to tell the difference between dreams
and reality – a recurring dream can eventually come to seem like reality itself.
As such, the senses distort reality. Therefore, how can social or physical
reality be known with any degree of certainty? The basis for knowledge is
reason. As experiences play tricks on the mind, they cannot be considered a
satisfactory foundation for knowledge.
Kant was also influenced by the idea that knowledge of the social and physical worlds is gained through experience. One of the most famous thinkers in this school of thought (known as empiricism) was the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711–76). Hume drew a distinction between ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’. The former, he argued, have more influence upon understanding. While complex ideas do not necessarily resemble impressions – a mermaid may be imagined without necessarily having seen one – the parts that make up complex ideas are themselves derived from impressions and impressions, in their turn, from experience. It is from a multitude of experiences in social life that ideas are then derived (see Chappell 1968).

Kant’s resultant fusion of reason and empiricism is complex. For the purposes of this journey, what is of importance is that his work contains a *focus imaginarius* as a ‘built in feature of the human mind’. This is concerned with ‘absolute truth, pure art and humanity as such’ (Rorty 1989: 195–196). Freedom is derived from an individualism which regards human subjects as autonomous and transcendental through the exercise of reason. In this way, a link is established between scientific knowledge and moral rules (each governed by ‘laws’):

Everything in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the capacity of acting according to the conception of laws; i.e., according to principles. This capacity is will. Since reason is required for the derivations of actions from laws, will is nothing else than practical reason.

(Kant quoted in Albro 1987: 167–168)

Kant concluded that the material world causes sensations, but mental apparatuses order these and provide the concepts through which people understand their experiences in the ‘phenomenal’ world (the ‘noumenal’ world being beyond experience). Out of this fusion of ideas comes an ability to reflect upon nature and society in a rational manner:

Rational mastery of nature and society presupposed knowledge of the truth, and the truth was a universal, as contrasted to the multi-fold appearance of things or to their immediate form in the perception of individuals. This principle was already alive in the earliest attempts of Greek epistemology: the truth is universal and necessary and thus contradicts the ordinary experiences of change and accident.

(Marcuse 1969: 17)

Reason is the guarantor of universal knowledge. Add to this the Cartesian claim of a universal standard against which truth could be objectively measured, independent of the objects of scientific inquiry, then the Enlightenment comes to represent an ascending history of the scientific coloniza-
tion over ‘valid’ knowledge. This requires that ‘other’ forms of knowledge are supplanted in the quest for objectivity, defined as ‘the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality, goodness, or rightness’ (Bernstein 1983: 8).

Equipped with reason, scientists could emerge as the legislators, not simply the interpreters of knowledge concerning the social and physical worlds (Bauman 1987). Science could establish the difference between ‘truth’ and ‘falsity’. Via Kant’s a priori categories of thought, the individual could make sense of their empirical world and the worlds of culture and nature become distinguishable:

As a result, the individual (not only the Cartesian mind) emerged as the subject, as subject of the world. Experiencing the world, the individual could claim to have a transcendental source of certainty within himself. He could set out to realize himself by realizing the world within himself.

(Luhmann 1986: 317)

The development of reason can also be related to how human subjectivity was structured under the consolidation of the rise of occidental modernity, where, beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the social sciences, industrial capitalism and bureaucratic politics synchronized novel ways of objectifying ‘individuals’ and ‘populations’ in western societies (Dumas and Turner 2006). The emergence of western rationality was accompanied by a growth of scientific traditions such as positivism, each intellectualizing the nature and extent of individuality. Empirical observation, reason and science are major themes of the Enlightenment project. It was the Age of Reason in the second half of the eighteenth century with the idea of progress elaborated by Kant, Turgot, Condorcet and others that gave rise to modernity. The French Revolution in 1789 gave momentum to a new consciousness and the Industrial Revolution provided its material substance (Munck 2002).

This modern world, this new social order, was characterized by a new dynamism, a rejection of earlier traditions, a belief in progress and the potential of human reason to promote freedom. Increasing rationality would enhance social understanding, order and control, justice, moral progress and human happiness (Layder 2006). Coupled with this was Descartes’s metaphysical axiom ‘Cogito, ergo sum’ (I think, therefore I am), which extolled the capacity of individual reason as the foundation of awareness and the locus of knowledge. As a rationalist philosopher and mathematician, Descartes forcefully separated between ‘mind’ and ‘body’ and thereby articulated a Cartesian dualism that has provided a pivotal feature of western society.
Central to this Cartesian epistemology is a systematic belief in the supremacy of logical reason over illogical nature; Enlightenment philosophy assumes that the rational self has an ‘inner’ relationship with the mind and an ‘outer’ relationship with the body. Therefore the individual is conceived not as part of ‘who we are’ but part of nature, hence an object to be controlled. With the Kantian philosophy of ethics, reason is identified with morality for it provides the principles for knowledge, certainty and universal law, whereas the body is identified with feelings and emotions that are, according to Kant, external forms of determination; a lack of freedom that takes individuals away from the path of pure reason (Dumas and Turner 2006).

The notion of transcendence went on to act as a basis for objective and universal knowledge, reinforcing the Cartesian method in which experience is deemed to be ‘real’ only if deeply entrenched within consciousness and entirely detached from the corporeal (Seidman 2001). Reason and rationality now became regarded as the source of a taken-for-granted superiority:

Mental life comprised for Descartes, above all, rational calculation, intuitive ideas, intellectual deliberations, and sensory inputs: we can accept responsibility for the validity of our calculations, but not the emotions that disturb or confuse our inferences

(Toulmin 1990: 40)

The causes and consequences of modernity are not only cultural and social, but also economic. As Munck (2002) points out, another driving force was capitalism with its constant quest for new raw materials, new sources of labour power, new technologies and new applications that might attract new consumers. From the outset modernity promised to change the world and each innovation spawned another. However, alongside this, differentials, in terms of who may have access to and be able to deploy ‘reason’, served as a sophisticated legitimization function between ‘scientific experts’ and ‘subjects’ of knowledge given the dichotomous relationship between individuals will tend to define themselves via their position or identity.

We now have a combination of influences with which to contextualize social theory. However, these were interpreted according to different political and intellectual cultures. These diluted, modified and challenged these insights. It is to an understanding of this process to which we now turn.

**Society: the object of study**

In Italy there was a social theorist who was already anticipating three trends that were to emerge in the nineteenth century. First, an interest in the nature of social development and social origins. Second, the merging of history and
philosophy into a ‘science of society’. Third, the attempt to discover rational-empirical causes for social phenomena in place of metaphysical or theological ones (Bottomore and Nisbet 1979: 563).

Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) was no ally of the dominant ideas of his era, particularly Cartesianism. Perhaps for this reason he was little understood or read in his own time. Nevertheless, Vico had an influence on later thinkers such as Auguste Comte (1798–1857), Robert Michels (1876–1936) and Georges Sorrel (1847–1922). His argument was that social theory should be centred around a human subject whose actions could be understood only in relation to the whole of society. In other words, the individual could not be abstracted from their social context. People were social creatures whose feelings came from their socio-cultural environment. These feelings were ‘sensory topics’ which provide the ‘roots’ of a ‘civil society’; they constitute the shared sense which arises among a social group who already share a set of circumstances – and it is against the background of such feelings as these that any conceptualization of what we take our human nature to be can be judged for its adequacy.

(Shotter 1993: xiii–xiv)

In England at this time, an inspiration for feminist ideas was apparent in the writings of Mary Astell (1668–1731) and, later, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97). In 1694 Astell wrote ‘A Serious Proposal to the Ladies’ (K. M. Rogers 1979). Differences between the sexes were not attributed to some examined idea of ‘nature’ or ‘reason’, upon which so many thinkers had drawn from the Greeks onwards (Griffiths and Whitford 1988; P. Johnson 1993; Okin 1980) but to the power that men held over women in society. If Descartes has proclaimed reason in all, then it must also be available to women:

It was this notion that the feminists seized upon so avidly. Mary boldly proclaimed the radical thesis that God had given all mankind the same intellectual potential – whether ancient or modern, rich or poor, male or female. Circumstances determine the extent to which men and women may exercise their rational faculties, but the faculties are present in all.

(Kinnaird 1983: 34)

Nearly one hundred years later, in 1792, Wollstonecraft (1989) called for women to enjoy the changes occurring within society. In the spirit of modernity she argued that women should aspire to the realm of reason over that of pleasing men’s desires, a relationship which serves to reinforce their subordination. These tensions between reason and emotion form, as we shall see in Chapter 2, a central part of the feminist critique of social theory.
In Scotland the so-called ‘Scottish School’ of Adam Ferguson (1723–1816), John Millar (1735–1801), David Hume and Adam Smith (1723–90), centred around Edinburgh, contributed to the Scottish Enlightenment. This group added to the idea that society was an object of study, with its own underlying properties, which should be examined through observation. They saw a link between social context and human actions. Hume characterized society in terms of customs and between social customs and ideas a link may be discovered. Overall, Hume’s work may be seen in terms of the dissection of human nature in order that he might advance the understanding of history: ‘In this sense, Hume’s thinking was totally secular and empirical’ (Heilbron 1995: 102).

In the case of Ferguson, it was the study of groups which formed the basis of his ideas. Indeed, he regarded conflict as a characteristic of society long before later ‘conflict’ theorists such as Max Weber (1864–1920) and Georg Simmel (1858–1918). Further, his ideas on the division of labour predated those of Marx and Emile Durkheim (1858–1917). In Ferguson’s view, the increased division of labour which came with modernity possessed the potential for progress, as well as a threat to social stability.

Although more rationalist in orientation than England or Scotland, French social theorists incorporated the challenge to rationalist epistemology from empiricism. The individualism of Descartes and Kant, when fused with the experiences of the French Revolution, were not a sufficient basis for a cohesive social order. Diverse as the ideas of French scholars became, these influences led to the emergence of some core themes:

Instead of a God-ordained society they spoke of reason; instead of regarding sin as inherent in man, they pinned their faith to human perfectibility and believed that education could the human personality; instead of the privileges of the different orders, they insisted upon egalitarianism.

(Beloff 1954: 176)

One of the main representatives of this tradition was Charles Montesquieu (1689–1755). His main concern was with human freedom and how government could be most efficiently organized to secure it. He was also interested in the connections between people’s opinions and the nature and structure of society. In the process, people were viewed

not as a multitude of individuals under one government, but as a community distinguishable from others by their manners and institutions. All institutions, political, religious, domestic, economic, and artistic, are, in his eyes, intricately related to one another, so that any considerable change in one is bound to affect the others.

(Plamenatz 1963: 256)
Through systematic study, Montesquieu wished to see how, in ways previously unsuspected, society forms people as ‘social creatures’. At the same time, he did not view society in terms of progressive development. This distinguishes his thought from the Enlightenment idea of progress found in the work of Comte. Where Comte emphasized unity, Montesquieu remained aware of diversity.

In Comte’s time the climate of opinion was more favourable to new ideas than it was for Montesquieu (Bierstedt 1979). Indeed, Comte is a central figure in the intellectual lineage of structuralism. This may be characterized in terms of ‘the relation is more important than the parts’ (Bottomore and Nisbet 1979: 558). This places structuralism at odds with the individualistic emphasis of other socio-theoretical traditions, in particular, those in nineteenth-century England.

Comte was to embrace the positive-rationalist idea of social progress, together with a belief in the scientific method for the purposes of studying and reconstructing the social, political and economic spheres of human life. Such was his faith in Positive Philosophy, which he learnt through his work with Saint-Simon, that he refused to read newspapers or books which had a bearing on his work; all part of his system of ‘cerebral hygiene’ (Bosanquet 1967). He was a pioneer of positivism which

in its classical nineteenth-century form is an empiricist interpretation and systematization of the sciences combined with a general theory of history and society which can be understood as theoretical articulation of a definite set of political problems.

(Benton 1977: 28)

In this way Comte added power to one of the central pillars of the Enlightenment: that is, the superseding of metaphysical and theological thought by science. This rejection of speculative thought placed sociology, as the highest science, firmly within the natural scientific paradigm. His view of ‘social physics’, with its theme of social statics (the science of order) and social dynamics (the science of progress), rejected the idea that social elements existed in separation from one another. As such, the individual subject could not exist separately from the society of which they were a part:

there must always be a spontaneous harmony between the whole and the parts of the social system, the elements of which must inevitably be, sooner or later, combined in a mode entirely comfortable to their nature.

(Comte in Parsons et al. 1965: 126–127)

This torch of positivism was taken up and held in different ways in the works of the English utilitarian philosopher John Stuart Mill (1807–73) and the social theorist Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), both of whom were influ-
enced by the political culture of English individualism. Mill developed his positivism based on the idea that although society was constantly changing, human nature was itself fixed. The task of social science became to explain observations and construct social laws as deduced from a constant human nature. In the case of Spencer, he held an evolutionary view of society through combining a radical individualism with a collectivist organicism – as derived from biology – of society’s social structures and institutions. Contrast the following with the quote from Comte above:

Society is made up of individuals; all that is done in society is done by the combined actions of individuals; and therefore, in individual actions only can be found solutions of social phenomena.

(Spencer 1969: 49)

Spencer was widely read in Victorian England, probably due to the support his ideas gave to the individualism of laissez-faire capitalism. The system of economic exchange was then provided with an intellectual legitimacy for its functioning, promises and effects. The same could hardly be said of a contemporary of Spencer’s: Karl Marx.

**From consciousness to capitalism**

In Comte’s positivism and structuralism there is a ‘philosophy of history’ (P. Burke 1980). Each of the aspects in his work – the unfolding of history, the condemnation of individualism, a belief in science and progress towards more enlightened times – are also characteristics of Marx. Here, however, the parallels end. His ideas were formed not only through the influences of Saint-Simon, but also in his encounters with the German idealist philosopher Georg Hegel (1770–1831) and with what are known as the ‘English political economists’ (see Barber 1981):

His belief in history ... more than anything else, distinguishes him from his predecessors and above all from Kant. ... Reality is to be understood in becoming and therefore in history. For the dialectical process, in which truth came from the coming together of opposing views, was only the mirror of a dialectical process in reality.

(Lindsay 1967: 58)

People become viewed as historical beings, not philosophical abstractions. Nevertheless, where Hegel was to emphasize consciousness, Marx was to emphasize actual human existence in given social situations. For Marx it was not ideas which formed society but, on the contrary, the actual material conditions under which people lived. Marx came to consider the ‘dialectic of
history' in opposing terms to Hegel. To understand this, it is first necessary to consider Hegel's work in some more depth.

For Hegel reason could become manifest in history. History unfolds in dialectic from thesis and antithesis to a synthesis. Two Enlightenment ideals are worth noting here: progress and freedom from an external world. Human 'being' must be defined, not in terms of something external to people, but in ways which depend upon an internal relation within and between each other. This is where his concept of 'mind' and its historical unfolding towards self-consciousness enters.

The Phenomenology of Mind (Hegel 1967a) is a study of how minds appear to themselves (phenomenology being the study of how things appear to people). Kant had argued that reality could never be known as it was, but comprehended only through the a priori categories of thought (space, time and causation). These are not part of reality, but the means through which it is grasped. Kant thus started with the idea of a 'reality' and 'that knowledge is some kind of instrument or medium by which we grasp reality' (Singer 1983: 50). This presupposes a difference between human beings and the reality they inhabit. Despite this, knowledge is still regarded as being part of reality. The question remains, however, as to how reality can be known by people, given their separation from it?

The Kantian answer to this question is that the instruments through which people seek to gain knowledge of reality must be known. It is this which forms the basis of Hegel's critique of Kant's epistemology:

\[\text{We ought, says Kant, to become acquainted with the instrument, before we undertake the work for which it is to be employed; for if the instrument be insufficient, all our trouble will be spent in vain. ... But the examination of knowledge can only be carried out by an act of knowledge. To examine this so-called instrument is the same thing as to know it. But to seek to know before we know is as absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim.}\]

(Hegel quoted in Singer 1983: 51)

The starting-point for knowing reality is now consciousness of that reality. Upon examination, the limitations of consciousness may be discovered. This will enable the development of a more sophisticated form of consciousness and so on, until 'absolute knowledge' is reached. Therefore, it is not necessary to be content with a Kantian 'appearance of reality'. Instead, knowledge can be gained of reality itself, for Hegel regards knowledge as historically constituted. 'Being' is linked with history and the 'Real' is the 'Rational': 'History is the substance of society, since the substance of society is nothing more than continuity. Humanity's being therefore lies in its historicity' (Heller 1984: 28).
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Hegel then links this with politics (Hegel 1967b). For clarity of exposition, we can say that the ‘idea’ or ‘ideal’ is to realize our potential in reality. This is freedom from a bond with nature through the development of self-consciousness. However, as people are socially constituted (the development of our personalities is a societal, not individual matter for Hegel) there must be a relation between our internal consciousness and the external sphere of the society which we inhabit. In other words, there must be a social means through which we are recognized as ‘free agents’. The means is ‘possession’ and its social manifestation is ‘property’ (see Ryan 1986). Yet there must be some regulatory relation between the seeking of individual ends and the wider society in order that it is maintained and reasonably stable. Aside from property, an answer to how this relationship is achieved is found in writings on the state.

The state is seen as a fusion between self-consciousness and the manner in which it is objectively manifested in social, political and economic relations. The rights of the individual and universal reason can thereby be united and the social problems created by a competitive society tempered. What Hegel termed ‘civil society’ can be moderated by this higher unity. Its absence would exacerbate a tendency towards what he called an ‘alienation of the spirit’: that is, the duality within people to regard their freedom as freedom from the constraints of the material world and to strive to be purely spiritual while, at the same time, recognizing that they are part of that world and thus cannot escape from it, nor transcend it.

To finally link Hegel to Marx we must do so via the work of Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–72). Feuerbach was a ‘Young Hegelian’ who examined ‘religion’ and ‘God’, but in so doing adopted a position opposed to it. Broadly speaking, he argued that God was a creation of human beings and not the other way round. Marx also reversed Hegel’s idealism, but as applied to the state. As people had created God, so they had created the state. Hegel argued that social relations were dependent upon the ‘idea of the state’ manifested in reason. Marx, on the other hand, argued that consciousness did not create institutions, but the material conditions under which people actually lived: ‘With me … the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought’ (Marx 1983: 29):

Marx reached the conclusion that it was not spiritual attitudes, but external conditions, the wealth men enjoyed or lacked, the ways they had to labour, which shaped society. Epochs were controlled not by conceptions of man but by material ends and means. The ruling interests and difficulty of men was relating to the world, not to the self.

(G. A. Cohen 1984: 22, original italics)
The explanation for civil society is now found in the material conditions of social life. History was not the unfolding of a ‘dialectic of spirit’, but a dialectic resulting from changes in the means of production. This is the guiding thread of Marx’s social theory:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness.

(Marx 1980: 181)

Given this, Marx was critical of philosophy in terms of both Hegel’s idealism and Feuerbach’s materialism (Marx 1961, 1964). Social theory now needs to explain the context of people’s actions so that thought and practice can fuse in what he termed ‘praxis’. The scientific validity of this theory rests upon its capacity not only to explain social life, but also to change it.

To achieve these aims Marx had to embark upon an empirical examination of capitalism, as well as a critique of the economic theory which provided for its legitimacy. Political economy, which assumed the existence of private property, did so without explaining the cause of the division between labour and capital in the first instance. Economic exchange is not some ‘accidental fact’: ‘The only wheels which political economy sets in motion are greed and the war amongst the greedy – competition’ (Marx 1981: 62, original italics). In a similar way, society, the state and social relations are not manifestations of some ‘spirit’, but of the ways in which people organize their societies on the basis of the means of production (the ‘base’). This, in turn, structures all other relations within society (the superstructure). Labour and the need to sell labour to capital, for the extraction of surplus value, in order to survive, oils the capitalist machine to the benefit of the few, not the many. Although Hegel was correct to connect ‘being’ to social relations and to restore history and meaning to the human realm, he was wrong to view this in terms of something called ‘will’. For Marx, the implications of this position were clear:

What is society, whatever its form may be? The product of men’s reciprocal action. Are men free to choose this or that form of society? By no means. Assume a particular state of development in the production faculties of man and you will get a particular form of commerce and consumption. Assume particular stages of development in production, commerce and consumption and you will have a corresponding social constitution.
Alienation also has a different origin. Hegel's outstanding achievement was to see the connection between self and social environment, but he was wrong to see labour only in terms of 'mental' labour. People are distinguished from all other living things through their ability to produce, but in a manner which takes account of their needs. They create through their labour, but capitalism, as a system of production, is dehumanizing. People become alienated from each other and the world in which they live through the use of their labour by a system which expropriates and abstracts it from their daily lives. Nor is private property the affirmation of self-development, but its very denial. The link between 'being in society' and the system under which people live is now established in a material, not idealist sense:

> What Marx saw as capitalism's most basic contradiction, between its increasingly social productive forces and its enduringly privatized mode of appropriation, reaches deep: into our selves. Modernity constitutes individuals as subjects not through but in opposition to the real sociality which concretely defines and differentiates them. (D. Sayer 1991: 72)

Capitalism now defines the character of modernity and capital becomes: 'the demiurge of the modern world' (D. Sayer 1991: 12). Marx noted how the division of labour 'seizes upon, not only the economic, but every other sphere of society'. It provides, at the expense of everything else, an 'all engrossing system of specializing and sorting men' (Marx 1983: 334). In this analysis, there was the potential for change. The end point of history is not self-consciousness, but communism. Here, co-operation and freedom from alienation would exist.

Despite the power of argument two questions, in particular, remain. First, how is capitalist society to be condemned, if it also contains within it the seeds for a better future? As Alisdair MacIntyre puts it: 'if the moral impoverishment of advanced capitalism is what so many Marxists agree that it is, whence are these resources for the future to be derived' (1985: 262)? This has led to a number of debates over the relationship between Marxism and morality (see Lukes 1985; McLellan and Sayers 1990). Second, does Marx's work inevitably imply the need for revolution, or could a better society be obtained through revisionism?

Attempts to answer these questions have moved through a myriad of ideas, which include the work of critical analysis to help the demise of capitalism on its way (Lukács 1971). In the case of the ‘revisionist controversy’, this was sparked by the writings of Bernstein, leading to a debate involving key Marxist figures at the turn of the twentieth century: for example, Kautsky, Luxemburg and Hilferding (see Laclau and Mouffe 2001).
Four schools of thought then emerged within Marxist thought: the orthodox school; the revisionist school; the Austro-Marxists and Lenin and the Bolsheviks (Bottomore 1979). All of which leads to a rich history of Marxist thought (see Kolakowski 1978a, 1978b).

The use of work to come to terms with the nature of modernity and its propensity for change is a continual feature of social and political thought. In terms of our immediate journey, when it comes to an absence of a consideration of the ethical realm in social life, over the predominance of the economic realm, we find one social theorist who, like many European social thinkers at the turn of the twentieth century, was looking for new sources of inspiration. As S. H. Hughes puts it regarding this phenomenon:

in asking themselves whether Marxism could properly be considered a science, they were inevitably led to pose the further question of what one meant by a science of society and the extent to which such a body of scientific knowledge was attainable at all.

(S. H. Hughes 1979: 73–74)

Ethics and social integration

As we have seen, for Comte, societal development was governed by social laws. With Hegel, history was conceived of in terms of the progress of the mind, with an ultimate dialectical progression towards self-consciousness. For Marx, history was seen in terms of progress but, in an inversion of idealism, then theorized in terms of the actions of people in concrete social situations. When it comes to the work of Emile Durkheim, however, he was to emphasize the ethical aspects of social life. In Durkheim’s hands, morality was to become a defining characteristic of modern society that expresses its collectively held needs. Durkheim attempted early in his career to establish an academic niche for his embryonic social science that would be distinct from its roots in moral philosophy and separate from its related and already established discipline, psychology. ‘Almost single-handed [Durkheim] forced the academic community to accept sociology as a rigorous and scientific discipline’ (Swingewood 1991: 97). By defining his own work in scope and method, he created the ‘boundaries’ of a social theory that were distinct from those of other emerging social sciences such as economics, political science, and anthropology. The ‘revolutionary character’ of Marx was one of the main reasons that Durkheim dismissed Marxism as a viable means for improving the moral or social condition in modern society. He felt that deep social change is always the result of long-term social evolution, not a sudden revolution from the working class.

Durkheim differed with Marx not only in how social improvements should be made, but also in terms of the theoretical, methodological, and
substantive approaches that sociology should take in its empirical observation of the social world. Just as the natural sciences look for physical forces that influence the world we perceive with our senses, social sciences look at social facts as external forces which exerted moral constraint on individuals. In this manner, Durkheim established the context of sociology as the study of ‘moral phenomena’, such as anomie, collective conscience and social currents and looked for structural manifestations (social facts) that influence and, more importantly, constrain individuals (Ritzer 2000: 187).

Durkheim employed his science of moral phenomena with the prospect of reintroducing and upholding a moral order within modern society. Durkheim’s opinion was that ‘the characteristic problem facing the modern age is to reconcile the individual freedoms which have sprung from the dissolution of traditional society with the maintenance of the moral control upon which the very existence of society depends’ (Giddens 1972b: 99). For this reason, his theories centred on the ideas of social cohesion (solidarity), moral order (law, anomie, collective conscience), and the role of ideas (religion) and most importantly their influence on the social life of individuals.

Durkheim’s own intellectual legacy was Montesquieu, Comte and Spencer, not Hegel and English political economy. There is also the political context in which he lived. As with Comte before him, this was a time of considerable change in France. Whereas for Comte it was the legacy of the French Revolution, for Durkheim it was events such as the Dreyfus Affair, defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71) and the German annexation of Alsace–Lorraine. Here is a writer who has been characterized as an idealist, a materialist, a social realist and a neo-Kantian (Lukes 1981). His social theory has been seen as a link between French conservatism and systematic sociology (Nisbet 1970: 13) as well as there now being critical and radical interpretations of his work (M. Gane 1992; Pearce 1989). Despite these contradictory interpretations, there is one thing that can be said about Durkheim’s work with certainty: in his hands, social theory and, in particular, sociology were to receive major boosts.

Durkheim’s work was organized around three goals. First, the establishment of sociology as a scientific discipline. Second, the foundation of a basis for the unity and unification of the social sciences. Third, the provision of an empirical, rational and systematic basis for modern society’s civil religion (Tiryakian 1979). Together with French intellectual figures such as Le Play, Proudhon and Comte, Durkheim contributed to the development of a normative social theory which sought to integrate morality and economic life for the purpose of social stability. This was a key feature of the liberal left in French social thought, translating into the political question as to how the traditional structures of society were to be incorporated and adapted to fit emergent forms? In terms of his third goal, his work may thus be character-
ized as contributing to the moral integration of the Third Republic. Aside from those already mentioned, what were the influences on his work towards this end?

First, there were the rigorous historical methods of Gabriel Monod and Fustel de Coulanges (Lukes 1981: 58–65). To this can be added the influence of the German social thinker Albert Schaffle and his idea of society as an ‘organism’. However, while defending Schaffle’s socialism against the charge that it was collectivist and authoritarian, the idea of an organism was a metaphorical, not literal device. On this Durkheim was clear. Society is not a set of material relations in the sense in which an organism is governed ‘mechanically’, but it is a set of relationships of ideas which neither are reducible to the persons who make up that society, nor can be separated from them. If moral order was to be regained following the transition from a traditional community (mechanical) to the interdependent modern society (organic), a temporary period in his opinion due entirely to a lack of moral cohesion brought upon by the cult of individuality and the specialization of labour, it would do so more easily if it were guided by a morally conscious democratic state advised and counselled by an empirically based moral science (Ritzer 2000).

In his encounters with socialism, Durkheim was always to emphasize morality over economics. This stemmed from the need to find ‘a substitute for traditional Christian teachings, so as to legitimate itself and win the broader support of new generations of schoolchildren, wrestling them away from the moral authority of the Catholic Church’ (Tiryakian 1979: 195). Without a moral basis for society, France would represent, as it had in the First and Second Republics, the exercise of power in the hands of one person, with the alternative being anarchy as manifested in a proletarian uprising. The solution to this problem lay in a rational and systematic inquiry into the causes, consequences and conditions for social order.

In this quest Kant was to be an important inspiration, but this was Kant mediated not through the works of Hegel, but through the writings of Charles Renouvier (1815–1903). Renouvier was a thinker from whose philosophy, it has been claimed, no less than the political culture of the Third Republic was derived (Lukes 1981: 55). His concerns were then reflected in Durkheim’s writings:

his uncompromising rationalism; his central concern with morality and his determinstion to study it ‘scientifically’; his neo-Kantianism emphasizing the compatibility of the determinism of nature with the freedom presupposed by morality; his Kantian concern with the dignity and autonomy of the individual together with his theory of social cohesion based on the individual’s sense of unity with and dependence on others; his preference for justice over utility and denial that the first can be derived from the second; his notion of
existing society being in a state of war and his view of the State’s role being to establish ‘social justice’ in the economic sphere.

(Lukes 1981: 55)

Renouvier was critical of Kant’s idea that experience was given via the a priori categories of thought. Instead, as in the works of Vico, Montesquieu and Marx, what if reason and categories of thought are not given a priori, but produced socially? From a structuralist vantage point, a change in the structures of society would then mean an alteration in experiences. This emphasis was to form a central pillar of Durkheim’s social theory whereby the philosophical, sociological and political fuse.

Durkheim’s ‘sociological epistemology’ would allow him to derive a new approach to ethics that would be capable of providing a basis for stability in times of change. Accepting that people are rational and ‘free’, rationality would be exercised through the construction of laws applicable to all. Society would then be the transcendental source and not universal reason as such. Society would possess an authority not only because it transcended each individual, but also because it was also contained within them. It possessed a twofold source of morality: ‘It was a set of facts-in-the-world from which correct moral inferences could be made and it was the authority for moral judgements’ (Hawthorn 1976: 121).

Together with his nephew Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) Durkheim saw sociology as the correct means for deriving moral forms within society. From a political point of view he argued for a harmony between the individual and the state and against the utilitarian individualism of Spencer and others. For Durkheim, this would result in what the philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) referred to as the ‘war of all against all’. At the same time, Durkheim defended the individual against large impersonal institutions. For instance, in a review of Merlino’s *Formes et essences du socialisme* (1898), he argued that the state, if it is to remain ‘normal’, should be moderated by autonomous, restricted groups: for example, professional associations. He takes up Merlino’s assertion that the individual and the state are necessarily antagonistic to each other:

Nothing could be more contrived than this so-called antagonism, the idea of which Merlino is quite wrong to borrow from orthodox economics. The truth is that the State has been quite the opposite – the liberator of the individual. It is the State which, as it grew stronger, freed the individual from private and local groups which tended to absorb him: the family, the city, the corporation, etc.

(Durkheim 1992: 57)

In the scientific pursuit of establishing a causal relationship between the moral reality of ‘modern’ turn-of-the-century France and the social forces that created that order (or disorder), Durkheim employed comparative
method (for example, comparing totemism to modern monotheistic religions) and the construction of dichotomies (such as normal versus pathological) to investigate the social world. As Seidman (2001) points out, the comparative method, properly understood, is the very framework of the science of society and is inseparable from a scientific sociology. As a result Durkheim established the methods it would employ in the observation of social facts and to establish causality in the pursuit of questions on the relationship between the individual and society. In the Preface to the first edition of *The Division of Labour in Society* he writes:

This work has its origins in the question of the relation of the individual to social solidarity. Why does the individual, while becoming more autonomous, depend more upon society? How can he be at once more individual and more solidarity?

(Durkheim 1964: 37)

The moral dimension to social life continually returns in his work. For instance, in the increasing division of labour, as represented in the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity, we find that the emergence of modernity leads to a greater recognition of a need for each other. This ‘togetherness’ ‘was the coming thing, rather than something which we were losing’ (Gellner 1988: 30). The laissez–faire ideal would not bring peace to people and Durkheim viewed Marx as sharing this economistic approach to social life which ignored the moral dimension and the ‘fact’ that the division of labour not only limits people’s activity, but also increases it (Durkheim 1964: 305). Indeed, in comparing their writings on anomie and alienation we can say that: ‘Social constraint is for Marx a denial and for Durkheim a condition of human freedom and self–realization’ (Lukes 1967: 142). Through employing Charles Darwin’s (1809–82) ideas, he reconciles a greater population density without an exacerbation of social conflict. An increased specialization of labour is argued to counteract the tendency towards conflict, as it enables coexistence in the performance of different services, yet in parallel to each other (Durkheim 1964: 266–267).

The balance between autonomy and togetherness is actuated through ‘moral individualism’. The source of this is Christianity, or Protestantism to be more exact:

Since for the Christian, virtue and piety do not consist in material procedures, but interior states of the soul, he is compelled to exercise a perpetual watch over himself. ... Thus of the two possible poles of thought, nature on the one hand, and man on the other, it is necessarily around the second that the thought of Christian societies has come to gravitate.

(Durkheim quoted in Giddens 1971: 115–116)
Comte was thus criticized for calling for a return to traditional times. The march of individualism could not be stopped and a new bridging system was required between the individual and society. Durkheim was clearly aware of the tensions which existed between pre-modern and modern forms of society. His belief in the potential harmonic position between the individual and society has frequently been stressed over the tensions he saw within society: for example, he has been characterized as a consensus theorist, in contrast to the conflict ideas of Marx, Weber and Simmel. Yet a motor of societal progress is expressed in terms of anomie, while he notes the role of desire and feeling in human relations, in contrast to the usual neo-Kantian readings of his work.

This emphasis on desire and feeling leads into the writings of the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), who wrote on the ‘will’ and ‘irrationalism’ in social thought. Progress is seen in his work not as the triumph of reason, but as the furtherance of the power of the ‘will’. After all, myths, habits and rituals should not, as both Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) recognized, be simply dismissed as irrelevant or uninteresting in the study of social life. If this reading of Durkheim is accepted, he recognized the tensions in modernity between will and reason. Is it this which gave rise to his desire to find a new basis for social solidarity in the France of his day, without recourse to the egoistic tendencies in modern western societies.

At this point we can make a link here from Durkheim to another leading social theorist: Max Weber. Schopenhauer influenced Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), who refused the Hegelian revision of a philosophy of history. In so doing: ‘He renounces a renewed revision of the concept of reason and bids farewell to the dialectic of enlightenment’ (Habermas 1992a: 86, original italics). The influence of Marx and Nietzsche is to be found in the writings of Max Weber.

The **forward march of rationalization**

Like Durkheim, Weber did not believe in a class revolution. Despite being contemporaries, however, they had little influence upon each other and were influenced by separate disciplines: Durkheim from French post-Enlightenment philosophy and Weber from the German historical school (Callinicos 2000). For Weber there are no historical laws, or any resolution of history through revolution. This has given rise to wide-ranging debates over his ideas, their meaning and applicability to contemporary times (Lash and Whimster 1987; Ray and Reed 1994). At the same time, he became an inspiration for a number of scholars (Dahrendorf 1959; Goldthorpe and
Marshall 1992; Rex 1961; Ritzer 2000). We may distinguish Weber, in part, from either Marx or Durkheim because of his unwillingness to see science as a means for prescribing ends:

Science today is a ‘vocation’ organized in special disciplines in the service of self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts. It is not the gift of grace of seers and prophets dispensing sacred values and revelations, nor does it partake of the contemplation of sages and philosophers about the meaning of the universe. This, to be sure, is the inescapable condition of our historical situation. We cannot evade it as long as we remain true to ourselves.

(Weber in Gerth and Mills 1970: 152)

We are led away from history as resolved by the ‘mind’ (Hegel), or the actions of people with common interests (Marx), or by the laws of historical evolution (Saint-Simon, Comte and Durkheim). Instead, history is resolved by ‘will’ (Hawthorn 1976). The link between modernity, rationality and progress is now cast into the realm of uncertainty. Weber becomes a theorist of ‘fate’ (B. S. Turner 1981) for whom modernity came to represent the forward march of rationalization. This can stifle the individual, but is a condition from which they cannot escape:

Weber saw historical change as the unintended effect of endless social processes and contingent circumstances ... this world-view is a social liberalism which asks us, given the complexity and uncertainty of knowledge, to behave responsibly – that is, as agents with ‘personality’ who are forced to make choices in conditions of unreliable knowledge.

(Holton and Turner 1989: 9)

These tensions are also apparent in the writings of two of Weber’s contemporaries: Georg Simmel and Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936). The nature of Simmel’s work has made for a myriad of interpretations. It has been characterized as ‘fragmentary’ and ‘unsystematic’ (Frisby 1992a, 1992b), while he is said to be the first sociologist of modernity (Frisby 1991) as well as the first sociologist of postmodernity (Weinstein and Weinstein 1991). As for Tönnies, he employed the ideas of ‘community’ (Gemeinschaft) and ‘society’ (Gesellschaft) to consider the changes from a rural to an industrial Germany in the forward march of modernity. The former is characterized by a ‘natural will’ of habit and instinct, while the latter is characterized by a ‘rational will’ which is instrumental in terms of its selection of means for ends. For Tönnies, there were ramifications for the ways in which individuals then related to one another. Parallels become evident in both of their works with Weber in terms of a concern for the fate of the individual in modern society.
It is the sheer range of intellectual influences which informed German social theory at this time which leads to this range of interpretations. When it comes to Weber, to the neo-Kantians and Nietzsche, we may add Marx, or more accurately those Marxists who were busy interpreting his work. In addition, Freund (1979) notes two other influences. The first of these derives from the distinction which is made between the state and civil society (which Marx had criticized). This is basic to an understanding of German intellectual culture at this time. Broadly speaking, the institution of the state is seen as ‘the source of all liberty, while society is the field of economic activity, which is the source of dependence and servitude’ (Freund 1979: 151).

The second influence was that of psychologism and historicism. According to the former, society could be studied in terms of a collective psychology. The focus here is upon, for example, languages, myths, habits, customs and so on, which permits one to speak of a ‘spirit’ in Hegelian terms. Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911), for instance, sought to discover an epistemological basis for the human sciences through their being rooted in ‘inner’ experience, rather than a natural-scientific ‘outer’ experience. This focus on understanding social life and the meanings for the individuals who comprise it, led him to develop a ‘descriptive psychology’. Historicism is then of importance due to a focus on the ‘lived experience’ of people. As such, history could not be ignored in the process of social inquiry.

It was in economics that an influential historical school emerged and from this discipline Weber had emerged (at one time he referred to himself as a ‘social economist’: Holton and Turner 1989). Together with the work of Windelband and Rickert on the role and meaning of history in knowledge, this fusion of intellectual cultures – psychologism, historicism, neo-Kantianism, Nietzsche and Marx – led him to reject all attempts at finding an ‘inner meaning’ or objective social laws in history. His methodological writings exhibit a combination of Dilthey’s idea of the meaningful ‘inner’ experiences of people (understanding), together with an analysis of the observed regularities of human behaviour in terms of the natural scientific idea of cause and effect (Weber 1949).

To the above we must add the changing political and economic culture of Germany in order to fully situate Weber’s work. As with Durkheim, Weber’s writings took place against the background of political problems. In particular, Weber was concerned to analyse the conditions of industrial expansion in Germany in the post-Bismarckian era. This led to an emphasis in his political sociology on two aspects: first, the furtherance of the German nation state, and second, that all politics is, in the last analysis, a struggle for power (*Macht*):

As a witness of Bismarck’s unification of Germany and the virtual elimination of the liberal, middle-class movements from positions of
political influence, Weber became convinced that great goals could be achieved only by power politics. For the rest of his life he set a premium upon examining political life without illusions, looking at it as a struggle between individuals and groups with conflicting beliefs and interests, always decided in the end by the reservoir of power available to the winning side and by its greater ability to use that power effectively.

(Bendix 1977: 7)

In charting these reactions to modernity, clear differences emerge between Weber and the other thinkers considered so far. His emphasis on the never ending nature of power struggles and his unwillingness to reduce the political sphere to the economic separate him from both Durkheim and Marx. In addition, although a defender of the objectivity of social science, he acknowledged the ‘extra-scientific’ dimension to its practice: for example, the cultural values which exist within particular societies and the ways in which they affect the reception of particular ideas.

The above noted, we also find a common reaction in the work of Weber and Durkheim. For both ‘have their origin in an attempt to defend – or rather re-interpret – the claims of political liberalism within the twin pressures of Romantic hypernationalistic conservatism on the one side, and revolutionary socialism on the other’ (Giddens 1971: 244). This shared quest was one of generating a liberal political consciousness in the face of the forward march of modernity. Here, we also find similarities with Marx who, after all, took aim at Romantic conservatism and utilitarian ideas. This emphasis not only allows for a modification of Marx and Durkheim’s insights, but also provides for a re-examination of the relationship between Marx and Weber (Lowith 1993; D. Sayer 1991). Although differences do exist between Marx and Weber, Weber told one of his students in the later years of his life:

One can measure the integrity of a modern scholar, and especially of a modern philosopher, by how he sees his own relationship to Nietzsche and Marx. Whoever does not admit that he could not accomplish very important aspects of his work without the work that these two have performed deceives both himself and others. The world in which we ourselves exist intellectually is largely a world stamped by Marx and Nietzsche.

(Weber quoted in Mommsen 1992: 54)

This fusion proved to be a ‘massive, but brittle, intellectual synthesis’ (Giddens 1972a: 58). Yet it is a dynamic which permits two outcomes. First, it renders Weber’s work of contemporary importance to understanding social life. Second, it allows a questioning of the simple distinction which can be made between Marx and Weber on the grounds that the former was a
materialist and the latter an idealist critic of Marx. Weber, for example, refers not just to the importance of ideas in examining social relations, but also of material interests – as is manifest in his observations on the Russian Revolution (Beetham 1974).

This situation is compounded through a failure to locate their works in terms of the social content in which they wrote. Weber read of Marx through the lenses of Friedrich Engels (1820–95) and Karl Kautsky (1854–1938), both of whom tended to perpetuate a view of Marx as somewhat mechanistic in his conceptions of society and social relations. What was lost in this interpretation was the element of praxis. After all, Marx provided ‘a theory for practical orientation, requiring human action to become reality’ (Mommsen 1992: 56). On this basis, Weber and Marx share an anthropological concern with the whole question of the relationship between the individual, modernity and social reality. For one, this reality was characterized as self-alienation, for the other, by a process of rationalization in which the individual found themselves increasingly trampled by vast impersonal forces.

As capitalism was the main characteristic of modernity for Marx, so rationalization was for Weber. In particular, what he referred to as formal rationality: that is, the application of rational calculable principles to everyday action. In contrast to the usual preoccupations of the Marx versus Weber debate: ‘a more appropriate approach to Weber's sociology may be located in the problems of modernization and modernity, and that we should regard rationalization as the process which produced modernism’ (B. Turner in Holton and Turner 1989: 69). This theme was given special emphasis in Weber's writings on religion and the emergence of capitalism (Weber 1985). In the ‘last analysis’, it was rationalization which gave rise to capitalism and under which all else is subsumed, including those elements prioritized by Marx:

Weber did not regard capitalism as a power made up of 'relations' of the forces and means of production which had become autonomous, so that everything else could be understood therefrom in terms of ideology. According to Weber, capitalism could only become the 'most fateful' power in human life because it had itself already developed within the framework of a 'rational way of life'.

(Lowith 1993: 63)

Here are echoes of Kant and Hegel fused with a Nietzschean fatalism. Human meaning and values were declining in the modern world. This was a situation which might be rectified by powerful leadership. To recap, it was Hegel who historicized Kant, leaving his abstract considerations on transcendental reason to became rooted in the unfolding of human history. Brunkhorst (1992) argues that in Weber's social history of religion we find a Hegelian objective 'spirit' (in this case, of capitalism) as a correlate of Kant's
abstract concept of a ‘categorical imperative’ (simply put, the duty to act according to a universal moral law regardless of the consequences of one’s actions). However, we should note that Weber would not guarantee an outcome for this process through his refusal to employ Enlightenment principles without qualification:

‘Scientific’ pleading is meaningless in principle because the various value spheres of the world stand in irreconcilable conflict with each other. ... I do not know how one might wish to decide ‘scientifically’ the value of French and German culture; for here, too, different gods struggle with one another, now and for all times to come.

(Weber in Gerth and Mills 1970: 147–148, emphasis added)

Modernity now appears tinged with disenchantment, not absolute progress. Formal rationality increasingly undermines substantive rationality, which involves ‘a conscious belief in the absolute value of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behaviour, entirely for its own sake and independently of any prospects of external success’ (Weber in Parsons et al. 1965: 1063).

The Protestant ethic is the key element in the rise of capitalism for Weber. This leads to the unintended consequence of an increased rationalization of social life. Weber’s social theory can thus be read as preoccupied with the everyday world of human culture (Smart 2007). History moves from the personal to the impersonal, leaving human meanings and values in its wake. Ironically, what starts as an irrational quest for salvation, ends up as the ‘iron cage of rationality’: ‘The premiums were placed on ‘proving’ oneself before God ... and ‘proving’ oneself before men in the sense of socially holding one’s own within the Puritan sects’ (Weber in Gerth and Mills 1970: 321). This drive towards self–perfection has a high cost:

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self–importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.

(Weber 1985: 182)

**Summary: the legacy for social theory**

The Enlightenment formed a backdrop against which the development of social theory could be evaluated. It would be incorrect, however, to charac-
terize this as a determining relationship. This was a relationship which was modified according to the cultural and political circumstances and intellectual traditions in which social theorists worked. It is these very aspects of social theory which provide it with the power of insight, relevance and critique.

 Writers such as Montesquieu, Hume, Smith and Ferguson, in their different ways, viewed people as ‘social creatures’, not metaphysical entities capable of floating freely over their social universes. This affected the nature of the relationship between the individual and society which witnessed a journey from Montesquieu, through Comte’s structuralism, to Spencer’s methodological individualism. In the process, ideas on how history unfolded, what the future might be, how it might best be secured, what constituted valid knowledge and what it was to be human, were illuminated.

 Marx considered the relationship between the individual and society in dialectical terms. For this purpose, he drew upon the work of Hegel, whose achievement was:

 to link a philosophical idea of rationality, couched in the broadest possible terms to comprehend mind, consciousness, the following of rules, the essence of what it was to be human, with everyday understanding of people about their practical business of learning skills, trading goods, getting married or engaging in state activities. (Albrow 1990: 112)

 Hegel challenged the idea of absolute truth and error characteristic of ‘the traditional, foundational picture of knowledge’ (Sayers 1989: 34). Marx took this on board, but applied a more materialist than idealist reading, ultimately viewing capitalism as the defining characteristic of modernity. For Marx, walking in the shadows of the Enlightenment, history would still unfold, but towards communism, not the idealist concept of self-consciousness. Yet if we jettison the tendential determinism associated with his ideas of history, it is perhaps not surprising that one recent biography notes that a special issue of the New Yorker in 1997 hailed Marx as the person who has taught us most about the dynamics of capitalism and as long as it persists, his work will be relevant (Wheen 1999).

 Durkheim, like Marx, was concerned with the fate of the individual in modern life. However, he was also concerned with the future of social solidarity in the France of his time. Changes in society required new modes of social integration which would respect individual autonomy, but without recourse to egoism. This moved him away from an economic, to an ethical focus in human affairs. Indeed, Durkheim’s greatest influence on the development of social science was probably the idea of society as an ‘actively moralising force’ (Bauman 1989: 172).
In Weber's work neo-Kantianism became fused with Nietzsche. Although committed to the idea that social science should start with the subjective meanings that people attach to their social lives, Weber was concerned with the fate of individuals in the forward march of modernity. Therefore, can this journey be characterized as one which travelled from the optimism of the early Enlightenment to one of pessimism? Put in these terms, this might not be unreasonable. However, if Weber appeared as a pessimist, he was not a full-blown fatalist. He drew the boundaries of science far tighter than had many of his predecessors. Science could not enter into the realm of value judgements. At best, it might help to decide upon the best means for the achievement of pre-selected ends.

We might now observe that at the end of this journey there appears a common thread among thinkers at the end of the nineteenth century. This fin de siècle spirit parallels that of recent times: ‘a deliberate breaking away from the seriousness of tradition ... and a seemingly liberal concern with what might still be termed socialist, democratic, humanistic ideals of justice and equality’ (Meštrović 1992: ix). This characterization is not without its problems. Indeed, we would probably not want to live in the pre-Enlightenment world, given the choice. Yet there are reasons for having reservations about the legacy the Enlightenment has left us. For example, a culture in which we are always looking for the most effective or efficient means for our ends often forgets to give adequate thought to those ends themselves. Cost–benefit analysis applied to environmental issues is often a case in point; the dispelling of ‘myth’ has led to a certain ‘disenchantment’, a loss of the sense of magic; the search for universal political and moral principles can now appear suspect (Powell 2005). ‘Whose justice? Which rationality?’ (MacIntyre 1988).

As we shall see later on, but highly pertinent to evaluating the Enlightenment characterization as progress, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote:

In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant. The program of the Enlightenment was the disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy ... What men want to learn from nature is how to use it in order wholly to dominate it and other men. That is the only aim. Ruthlessly, in despite of itself, the Enlightenment has extinguished any trace of its own self-consciousness. The only kind of thinking that is sufficiently hard to shatter myths is ultimately self-destructive. Power and knowledge are synonymous.

(Adorno and Horkheimer 1979: 55)
Yet the Enlightenment does serve to question the idea that past social theorists simply built their ideas upon the comfortable certitudes of something called the ‘Enlightenment’ and that their ideas therefore no longer speak to contemporary concerns. Those who have proclaimed the ‘end of history’, now find themselves turning to thinkers such as Weber and Durkheim to explore the culture basis to economic development (Fukuyama 1995). In continuing this history of social theory, we will find that revisions and critiques are plentiful. In the process, ideas regarding the promise of modernity and the relationship between the individual and society were to be viewed in new and illuminating ways.