The Sociology of Anthony Giddens

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Acknowledgements

Finally, I would like to dedicate the book to my grandmother, Kartar Kaur Rehal, my two brothers William and John and particularly to my mother and father Lakbhir Kaur and Harjit Singh Loyal who have always supported me in everything I do.

Introduction

Few would object to the view that Anthony Giddens is Britain's foremost sociologist. The recent publication of a four-volume book set dedicated to his writings shows that his work not only carries an intrinsic significance, but perhaps, more importantly, that it continues to exert a considerable theoretical influence on the direction and development of British sociology in general (Bryant and Jary 1997). Previous critiques of Giddens's sociological works have tended to focus on the formal concepts and ideas underlying his contributions to the subject. In this respect this book offers nothing new.

However, this emphasis on the abstract architecture of his work underplays the dynamic character of his texts and fails to elucidate the broader social and political rationale underlying his approach. This book seeks to fill this lacuna by focusing on the developmental nature of Giddens's work drawing sparingly upon the sociology of knowledge. In contrast to immanent ahistorical approaches, the intention here has been to elaborate the historical emergence, structure and direction of sociological knowledge in relation to group dynamics and political interests.[1]

The central argument of this book is that Giddens's sociology needs to be placed within the social, political and historical context within which it was constructed. His theoretical project makes sense only as part of a wider world-view which centres on an attempt to renew a progressive form of liberalism. The distinctive pattern of theoretical innovation, the eclectic derivation and combination of concepts, the inclusion and exclusion of certain principles and ideas, as well as the theoretical inconsistencies and contradictions which arise in consequence, derive ultimately from this commitment to progressive liberalism. Placing his ideas in a context of a broader political world-view allows us to make sense of a pronounced shift in the content of his work after 1989, in addition to his most recent and most overtly political work on the 'Third Way' – work which has served as both a basis for and a rationalisation of Tony Blair's politics. Although this study is primarily concerned with Giddens's structuration theory, it also incorporates an analysis of his work on modernity and politics, arguing for the interconnection of all three.

It will also be argued that, although Giddens attempts to move beyond certain traditional dualistic approaches by recognising, for example, that 'agents' only become 'agents' in and through 'social structures', one consequence of his world-view is a residual commitment to a form of epistemological individualism. Despite repeated reference to the importance of social practices, this unnecessary individualism effectively reproduces conceptual binaries relating to structure and agency.

The shape of my argument is as follows. Chapter 1 elaborates the social, political and historical context within which Anthony Giddens develops his sociological project. It is argued that his world-view provides a prescriptive rationale for the inclusion in his writings of a number of theoretical postulates and tenets. This 'world-view' is seen to represent a failed synthesis between liberalism and aspects of socialism in the guise of a libertarian-socialism. It is contended, following Mannheim, that Giddens follows a 'natural law' style of thought which draws heavily on the Enlightenment. Chapter 2 analyses the epistemological foundations of structuration theory which account for the basis of individual agency in relation to the 'knowledgeability' of actors. It is argued that Giddens's moral-political world-view requires a standpoint which aims, simultaneously, to rehabilitate the status of an actor's knowledgeability and to argue that this knowledge is fallible in relation to sociological critique. However, this uncomfortable synthesis oscillates epistemologically between foundationalism and a form of relativism. Chapter 3 examines Giddens's theory of action and agency. Giddens stresses two fundamental tenets in regard to actors: their *knowledgeability* and their *capability*. The former is demonstrated in terms of the actor's discursive and practical consciousness. The latter is indicated by the power of the agent 'to always do otherwise' as a result of his/her transformative capacity. Giddens's agent is seen to bear a strong imprint of his moral-political standpoint. Hence, the commitment to voluntarism implicitly demonstrates a desire for individuals to have the capacity to choose and to effect change in the existing order of things. His position on agency also contains deep theoretical flaws.

Chapter 4 evaluates Giddens's deployment and reworking of the concept of 'structure'. It will be argued that a central conflict in the agency/structure debate concerns the question of whether 'structure' should be regarded as a noun – referring to patterned social relationships – or as a verb, referring to generative rules and resources. It is

posited that this division represents a displacement of the agency/structure couplet. After reviewing Giddens's novel conception of structure as rules and resources what remains unexplicated, yet intrinsic to this concept, are time and space. These concepts, as well as Giddens's proposal for a discontinuist view of history to supplant Marxism, are therefore analysed in Chapter 5. It is argued that the conceptualisation of time and space suffers from similar problems to those concerning the conception of structure as rules and resources. Moreover, Giddens's historical sociology contains a number of contradictory and dualistic value assumptions, again reflecting his world-view. Chapter 6 outlines Giddens's theory of modernity and focuses on empirical and theoretical problems associated with the concept of reflexivity. Chapter 7 discusses the concepts of rationality and reflexivity as a way of disclosing the political conundrum of the 'paradox of socialism' underlying his work. In Chapter 8, Giddens's political sociology, which he describes as 'Third Way politics', is elaborated in relation to his commitment to progressive liberalism. Attention is drawn to the inadequacy of his treatment of power and domination. Chapter 9 looks at the historical nature of the agency/structure debate and offers an alternative sociology. It is argued that these concepts represent a particular way of perceiving the social world and cannot provide the basis for a general sociology. Instead, a standpoint which originates in Aristotle but is carried forward by Marx and Durkheim and emphasises the social nature of humans will be proposed. Chapter 10 summarises the argument of the book.

1 The Political and Sociological Project

> In the contemporary world we are between capitalism and socialism in two senses, and any discussion of normative political theory must be concerned with both. In the shape of actually existing socialist societies, socialism is a reality, part of the power-bloc system that tenuously controls the anarchy of the world nation-state order. It is no longer plausible, if it ever was, to say that they are not really socialist at all or that their insufficiencies have nothing to do with Marxist thought in general. On the other hand, if socialist ideals retain any validity, we are between capitalism and socialism in the sense that such ideals seem capable of much more profound development than has been achieved in any society to date. (Giddens 1987, p. 181)

In this chapter, I aim to contextualise what follows in the rest of this book by examining Giddens's work in terms of a world-view.[1] Such a theoretical manoeuvre permits us not only to understand some of the contradictions which occur in his copious writings, but also to account for the shifts in his sociological perspective. More specifically, this chapter will look at how the practice of sociology within an academic field of production is conditioned by an intersecting political field.[2] It will be argued that Giddens's work has always embodied a political project characterised by an attempt to combine liberalism with aspects of socialism. In practice the emphasis on renewing liberalism has always overshadowed the residual commitment to any more radical socialist or libertarian project.

ANTHONY GIDDENS

Anthony Giddens was born in Edmonton, London in 1938. He was the son of a clerk employed by London Transport. He attended the University of Hull and graduated in 1959 with a combined honours degree in sociology and psychology. He went on to earn a Masters degree in Sociology at the London School of Economics and in 1961

became a lecturer in the Department of Sociology at Leicester University. Between 1967 and 1969 Giddens held a visiting Assistant Professorship at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. After a short stint at UCLA, he went on in 1970, to become a lecturer at King's College Cambridge and attained a Professorship in 1986, having already become a director of Polity Press in 1985. Giddens eventually left Cambridge in 1987 to become Director of the LSE, a position that he currently occupies.[3]

Giddens's intellectual career can be analysed into five overlapping chronological periods, each marked by a distinctive set of theoretical preoccupations. The early work on suicide contains little of theoretical interest, although it does demonstrate the individualistic social psychological orientation which was to remain a continuing feature of his work.[4] It was not until his trenchant (and canonical) analysis of the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim in *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971a) that he established his reputation as a major theoretical contributor to sociology. This was followed shortly afterwards by an attempt to re-evaluate the sociological conception of class in *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (1973). These important works were then followed by a third phase in Giddens's work which was characterised by an attempt to 'transcend' a number of dualisms within social theory, most significantly, the opposition between agency and structure. In parallel with this theory of structuration was Giddens's attempt to rewrite and re-periodise human history through a critical encounter with historical materialism. Giddens's writings on ontology and substantive history spanned a decade, from the late 1970s to the late 1980s. The fourth substantive phase in his career was marked by an attempt to analyse the contours of 'late modern' societies – or what he referred to as 'modernity'. This prepared the way for his most recent and most overtly political writings, which have sought to transcend the dichotomy between left- and right-wing political ideologies. This attempt to extend the political horizon 'beyond left and right' has identified him firmly as the foremost intellectual spokesperson for the 'Third Way'. These five overlapping periods in Giddens's intellectual development are summarised below:

1. 1960–70: early writings
2. 1971–75: analysis of nineteenth-century social theory and its relevance
3. 1976–89: structuration theory and historical sociology

4. 1990–93: theory of modernity
5. 1994 to the present: Third Way politics

From this chronology, the broad contours of Giddens' intellectual career become apparent: from outlining and analysing the work of other theorists to the development of his own theory of structuration and history, followed by an analysis of 'late modernity'; and finally to a political analysis as overt political engagement. Presented in this way, it might appear that a practical orientation towards politics only figures rather late in Giddens's work. In this book, however, it is argued that a profoundly political or ideological dimension has been present in his work from the outset. Although his substantive theoretical concerns have changed, there remains an underlying progressive liberal 'world-view'.

THEORY AS WORLD-VIEW

Though encapsulating a diversity of competing and conflicting approaches to the study of knowledge and the social world, and including reference to figures as disparate as Marx, Durkheim, Mannheim, Lukacs, Goldmann, Scheler, Berger and Luckman, and Bourdieu and Foucault, the sociology of knowledge[5] is unified in virtue of its claim that knowledge is socially constructed. Following this line of thinking, it will be argued throughout this book that the totality of Giddens's work can also be examined in terms of a 'world-view' expressing social, ethical and political interests which act as causal determinations affecting the content and coherence of his work.[6]

  In this chapter I shall outline the central political and intellectual contradictions which run through the whole of Giddens's work. I shall attempt to provide a framework through which this work can be contextualised. This procedure does not, however, simply mean furnishing a purely politically reductive history of Giddens's work, as is often a side-effect of the sociology of knowledge.[7] Rather, the political and the sociological moments will be regarded here, following Bourdieu (1977), as reflecting two analytically distinct fields with a corresponding habitus. That is, they represent two different social spaces to which correspond two homologous mental spaces (Bourdieu 1991). Nonetheless, although both of these fields possess a certain relative autonomy and follow a different 'logic', it is possible for one field to become translated into the other. In this case, reference to the political field allows us to explain both the

internal theoretical anomalies *within* Giddens's work as a whole and the theoretical shifts in his writings. It is important to note, however, that it is not social influences *per se* that are the problem. The problems located in Giddens's work are not explainable simply by reference to their ideological, political and ethical underpinnings but, rather, these determinations result in a mode of analysis which is both sociologically and empirically inadequate. Such a procedure implicitly presupposes a view of knowledge which is both genetic and social and which regards knowledge as 'actively' and collectively produced by interacting and competing social groups, embedded in differential structures of power. As Barnes notes:

> Knowledge is not produced passively by perceiving individuals, but by interacting social groups engaged in particular activities. And it is evaluated communally and not by isolated individual judgements. Its generation cannot be understood in terms of psychology, but must be accounted for by reference to the social and cultural context in which it arises. Its maintenance is not just a matter of how it relates to reality, but also of how it relates to the objectives and interests a society possesses by virtue of its historical development. (Barnes 1977, p. 2)

Two main implications follow from such a viewpoint, both of which take us away from the notion of a self-sufficient and autonomous actor who individually 'creates' beliefs and theories. Firstly, as Mannheim and Elias both recognise, knowledge is not produced *de novo* by intellectuals but draws instead upon previously developed or extrapolated knowledge.[8]

Secondly, the subject of thought and action can be conceived neither as an isolated individual nor as a collective subject. This standpoint reflects the individual/society, agency/structure dualism which Giddens himself wishes to resolve. Instead, the subject of thought consists of networks of interacting social individuals, each of whom belongs to an array of different groups and networks and participates on an ongoing basis in a number of different social relations or fields (familial, occupational, national, friends and acquaintances, social classes, and so on). When the totality of these relations is combined in relation to a single concrete social individual, it forms a unique, complex and sometimes relatively contradictory 'individual' mental structure.

In addition to the social and historical nature of social reality postulated here, following Durkheim, Marx and more recently Goldmann and Bourdieu, the mental structures of social individuals should be understood as being homologous with the order of their social world: so that, as Durkheim famously noted, the classification of things reproduces the classification of people.[9] However, in contrast to the rigid use of classificatory and taxonomic metaphors by these thinkers, these mental structures can be regarded as being continually produced on an ongoing, finite and contingent basis.[10] Such mental structures can then be grouped according to what may be characterised as a 'world-view'. Expressing the consciousness of its members' affective, intellectual and practical orientation, a world-view guides and is moulded in response to the problems presented by interrelations with other groups and with nature.[11] On this basis we can analyse the forms of classification consciously and unconsciously employed by any individual thinker.

THE INTELLECTUAL FIELD

The Enlightenment

The *longue durée* of ideas which are rooted in the Enlightenment provides an overwhelmingly important intellectual context for Giddens's own project. *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971a) can be seen as his first major engagement with the sociological legacy of the Enlightenment. The ideas of the Enlightenment not only shaped the writings of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, but also expressed the contours of emerging political ideologies in the shape of liberalism, conservatism and socialism. The point of departure for understanding both classical and modern sociology is the combination of an emerging secular world-view and revolutions (specifically the French, American and Industrial Revolutions) in the political, social and economic orders in the eighteenth century. Sociology has always played interlocutor to the problems consequent upon modernisation. Both the scientific and liberal values of the Enlightenment, and the conservative and romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, framed the central problematics and theoretical agenda of classical sociology. However, it is important to remember that these ideas were taken up differently by different sociologists, often because of the historically divergent experiences and class configurations in different countries. If Britain is taken as the measure,

neither France nor Germany achieved such industrial growth or internal political stability. Against Jacobin hopes, the Restoration in France re-entrenched reactionary interests. Germany, in contrast, prior to Bismark and Prussian unification, remained a loose aggregation of sovereign states under Junker hegemony. Hence the sociological revolution and its preoccupation with 'man' and community cannot be understood independently of any of these social, political, cultural and economic configurations or, more specifically, of the Enlightenment itself (Nisbet 1967, Hawthorne 1976, Seidman 1983).

The Enlightenment, as Cassirer, Gay and Goldmann have all pointed out, was in no way a simple or unitary phenomenon. The elasticity and differences within the movement were again reconfigured both by the national social, political and cultural differences between Britain, France and Germany – despite the reciprocity of influences among them – and by the broad historical span and diversity of political opinion which the concept attempts to capture.[12] As a result it may be more useful to talk of Enlightenment, or enlightenments, as some have argued (Foster 2001). Notwithstanding the fact that the Enlightenment was never a monolithic project, it always carried political consequences and those who have shared or rejected its intellectual and social implications have often done so for political reasons. In earlier times, immediately after its ascendence,[13] the Enlightenment was challenged by a conservative reaction. In more recent times, it has also been attacked by writers of a left-liberal persuasion, often influenced by Nietzsche or Heidegger (for example, Adorno, Horkheimer, Foucault and, more recently, by a number of postmodernist writers) who see the Enlightenment project as nothing short of a return to repressive forms of social bondage through the obliteration of difference and multiplicity.[14]

Although it reached its apogee in France (see, *inter alia*, Gay 1977), by championing what Gay calls the trinity of atheism, republicanism and materialism (ibid.) the paradigmatic expression of Enlightenment remains Kant's description of the Enlightenment as the emergence from infancy:

Infancy is the inability to use one's reason without the guidance of another. It is self-imposed, when it depends on a deficiency, not of reason, but of the resolve and courage to use it without external

guidance. Thus the watchword of the enlightenment is: *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use one's own reason! (Kant 1996, p. 54)

Enlightenment thinkers opposed the organisation of conduct and knowledge into closed and dogmatic systems which, according to its advocates, led to intolerance, fanaticism and authoritarianism.

Moreover, by seeing all individuals as equal because equally rational, tolerance was to be extended to other creeds and ways of life, and was to replace local historical prejudices which were not founded on reason. Hence Locke's noted essay on toleration argues for religious tolerance though, interestingly, not for atheism.

However, the Enlightenment was not only a battle against religious views, superstition and monarchical structure which were central characteristics of the feudal order.[15] It was also a positive attempt to replace these with a critical conception of the world: a way of seeing man's relation to the world in terms of rational knowledge. Again, Kant expresses this paradigmatically in his *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism, and to criticism everything must submit. Religion, through its sanctity, and law-giving through its majesty, may seek to exempt themselves from it. But they then awaken just suspicion, and cannot claim the sincere respect which reason accords only to that which has been able to sustain the test of free and open examination. (Kant 1997, pp. 100–1)

This was the basis for the scientific posture of the Enlightenment. Nature was no longer simply an expression of Divinity, but was regulated by an interlocking system of universal laws of which, in certain respects, 'man' formed a part. As Kant insisted, the world itself was ordered and logical and could become known through the rational activity of science, exemplified by Newtonian mechanics.

The writers of the Enlightenment always thought of knowledge in close connection with action. Human practice, however – both in its effects on nature and in its social and historical consequences – was generally regarded in terms of individual action, or as the simultaneous action of individuals in large numbers (exceptions to this individualism include Hume, Voltaire and Montesquieu), and also as the application of knowledge acquired by the intellect. As Goldmann notes:

> For them [the Enlightenment philosphers], the mission of man, which gives meaning to his life, lies in the effort to acquire the widest possible range of autonomous and critical knowledge in order to apply it technologically in nature and, through moral and political action, to society. Furthermore, in acquiring his knowledge, man must not let his thought be influenced by any authority or any prejudice; he must let the content of his judgements be determined only by his own critical reason. (Goldmann 1968, p. 2)

Hence the eighteenth-century Enlightenment included various rationalist and empirical currents of thought which, despite their numerous differences, treated the individual as the point of departure for all investigation of knowledge and action. Rationalism, in the work of, for example, Descartes and Leibniz understood true knowledge as innate ideas existing independently of experience, whereas empiricists such as Locke and Bacon located the origin of knowledge in sense-perception, with the majority of Enlightenment thinkers occupying a position somewhere in between these extremes.[16]

While for many of these thinkers the free individual provided an obvious point of departure,[17] others, such as Rousseau, concurrently emphasised equality between individuals. The social contract, Rousseau argued, was an agreement between free and equal individuals, all willing to put themselves under the general will. Along with freedom and individualism there was also an emphasis on equality before the law.[18]

The Enlightenment did not originate only in the context of a reaction against Christianity's emphasis on God, religion and hierarchy but also in opposition to its pessimistic view of human nature, often rooted in the idea of original sin. According to many Enlightenment thinkers, human beings were by nature rational and good. Moreover, by systematically underemphasising the non-rational aspects of human nature – though the role played by sensuality and desire were acknowledged – the Enlightenment argued that individuals and humanity could strive toward perfection. An emphasis on progress and an orientation toward the future were the central hallmarks of this approach.[19]

As part of the emancipation from religious bigotry, therefore, the Enlightenment saw human beings as universally rational individual agents who act for reasons which are not determined by the influence of traditional political or religious authority. Rationalism meant

above all freedom with regard to all external authority and constraint, and also freedom with regard to our passions. Yet in cases in which each individual, autonomously and independently of other men, decides what is true or right, the bond between the individual and the community is broken. The universe and the community become external things which can be contemplated or observed, but which no longer have any human and living relation to the subject. According to Goldmann, this chasm between individual freedom and community or universe became the central preoccupation of Kant's philosophy. However, as we shall see, its implications run through classical and modern sociology, too.[20]

Liberalism

As a political philosophy, liberalism[21] contributed heavily to Enlightenment thought, though the latter remains a more capacious term. Like the Enlightenment, there is no straightforward standard definition of liberalism. As a doctrine spanning over 300 years it contains numerous strands and various arguments that have changed from generation to generation according to an array of social, political and geographical vicissitudes. Nevertheless, the distinguishing feature of liberalism as a world-view is the value it places upon 'man' as individual and upon freedom (Goldmann 1971, p. 26), whether as freedom from coercion, moral self-determination, or as the right to individual happiness. Liberals have sought to defend individual freedom through a variety of discursive idioms – for example, the doctrine of natural rights (Locke), utilitarianism (Bentham), moral idealism (Kant), historicism (Humboldt), or fallibilism (Mill). Liberalism originally arose as a reaction against a static, religious, hierarchical and fixed absolutist order, which maintained various obstacles to individual liberty through customary privileges. In contrast, early forms of liberalism spearheaded an attempt to universalise a number of liberties for every citizen. These included freedom of speech and of assembly, religious toleration, freedom from arbitrary arrest or imprisonment, and freedom to vote and exercise a democratic choice. Liberals championed the cause of freedom on the assumption that individuals were rational enough to shape their conduct and beliefs with minimum interference from either state or Church. They sought to conduct authority away from these central agencies of society in order that its members might exercise a degree of self-government or personal responsibility. This thinking often presupposed a strident emphasis on secularisation.

Since many of the earlier liberals believed that liberty flourished in a free economy that imposes few restrictions on the accumulation of private property, liberalism became inextricably tied to *laissez-faire* capitalism, and was seen as an ideology of the new middle class as it rose to political dominance. Liberalism may have begun as an ideology against tradition, but it was to later gain meaning in contradistinction to conservatism and socialism.[22]

Towards the end of the nineteenth century certain forms of social liberalism modified the commitment to a minimal state and instead came to emphasise state responsibility for the poor. The rationale for this more interventionist stance hinged on the capacity of poor people to exercise their own liberty. In addition, as Robert Eccleshall (1986) notes, running through liberalism is a persistent conviction that political stability presupposes a moral community of individuals who cooperate in the pursuit of common objectives. Liberals confronted aristocratic paternalism with an alternative meritocratic social ideal of the self-made man whose wealth and status were achieved rather than conferred by birth. Liberals wished to make the working classes virtuous. In becoming thrifty, prudent and self-reliant they would alleviate their condition, and so free themselves from dependence upon aristocratic benevolence. Such law-abiding citizens would abandon any illusions that their future lay in class warfare. Again, liberals endorsed policies intended to universalise bourgeois virtues as a means of promoting the moral elevation of the labouring classes. Notwithstanding inequalities of income, which came with the diversity of individual talent and achievement, the liberal desire was to create a one-class society through common habits of self-discipline and citizenship.

Since many of the radical ideas of these liberals have been taken up by other parties – ideas such as civil liberties, representative and accountable government, democracy and even social welfare and the mixed economy – the lines of demarcation between liberals, social democrats, those in the centre or right of the Labour Party and even the 'wet wing' of the conservatives are constantly being blurred.[23] Liberalism has always contained many progressive impulses, which socialists have taken up and attempted to radicalise.[24] This will become clearer when we look at Weber, Durkheim and, most importantly, Giddens. However, before we do so, we can usefully extend this analysis of the Enlightenment and liberalism by drawing on the work of Karl Mannheim. As a leading sociologist of knowledge, Mannheim identifies the production of knowledge by

referring it to its sociological context through his concept of 'existential determination' or *Seinsverbundenheit*.[25] In his essay on conservatism, Mannheim (1986) identifies specific thought styles, a notion which he takes from the history of art.[26] Here he aims to describe two styles of thought in the specific context of early nineteenth-century Europe and to identify their social carriers – the rising bourgeoisie and the conservative reaction to the Enlightenment. The two starkly opposed styles of thought he identifies are the natural-law or bourgeois thought-style, which originated in France and held sway up to and just after the Revolution, and the conservative thought-style, which originated in Germany between 1800 and 1850 (Barnes 1994).

Notwithstanding certain lacunae in his standpoint,[27] Mannheim's approach still offers a fruitful way to proceed. The philosophical and political reaction to both liberalism and to the Enlightenment and its embodiment in the French Revolution, as Mannheim points out, was overwhelming. Its two fundamental representatives were conservatism and, to a lesser extent, romanticism. The conservative style of thought arose explicitly in diametric opposition to all the central characteristics of natural-law thinking. For Mannheim, the core of conservatism was that it was 'traditionalism become reflective'. In contrast to the codified and reflective natural-law style of thought, it was external to the conservative form of life and opposed the former on all fronts. It was empirical as opposed to rationalistic, cautious as opposed to optimistic, concrete as opposed to abstract, holistic as opposed to atomistic (Barnes 1994). In many circumstances, it sought to preserve the status quo rather than transform institutions wholesale.[28] In addition to a pessimistic view of human nature based on egoism, power and mutual suspicion, it normatively postulated a stratified social order where 'communal' property explicitly carried differential privileges, rather than expressing the relationship of an individual to an alienable commodity. Conservatism sought to valorise the actions and thoughts of everyday life rather than criticise them. For conservatism, experiencing and thinking are connected to what is immediate and concrete in a practical way, it is against progressive action that is animated by a consciousness of what is abstractly possible or speculative.[29] The emphasis is in life over reason, practice over norms and being over thought (Bloor 1983, p. 162). For Mannheim, this conflict can be represented in a series of binary opposites which is represented in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1   Styles of thought

Natural law	Conservative
Based on reason	Based on history
Abstract	Concrete
Quantitative	Qualitative
Universal validity	Local validity only
Generalising/socialising	Embedded/particular
Deductive	Anti-deductive
Inference from general principles to particular cases valid	Deductive inference – impossible/invalid
Atomistic	Holistic
Mechanical	Organic
Static	Dynamic
Criteria of validity – eternal/absolute	Criteria of validity – in process of change
Non-dialectical	Dialectical

Source: Barnes (1994, p. 67), adapted from Mannheim (1986, pp. 107–9).

In addition to a generalised conservative attack upon the Enlightenment and its liberal preoccupations, there arose a romantic response to its rationalism. Many romantic writers questioned the emphasis placed by the Enlightenment on the rational basis of human action. As a result, there were some overlapping tendencies between conservatives and romantics.[30] Expressed in terms of oppositions, romanticism also emphasised the concrete over the abstract, variety over uniformity, nature over culture, the organic over the mechanical, freedom over constraint, the emotional over the logical. In contrast to conservatism however, the unique individual was paramount for romanticism.[31] Its emphasis was on the organic whole and the world as some spiritual unity which had been shattered by the modern capitalist world in which individuals became divorced from themselves and, more importantly, from nature.

The conflict between traditionalism and modernism and the contradictions thrown up by the French Revolution and Industrial Revolution emphatically defined the parameters and dilemmas of sociology. Industrialism threw up problems relating to the condition of labour, the transformation of private property, urbanism, technology and the factory system. The democratic revolution highlighted problems relating to centralisation, egalitarianism, secularism, bureaucracy, individual rights and the moral reconstruction of the family, church and property. The intellectual elements of sociology were therefore refractions of the same forces and tensions

that also produced liberalism, socialism and conservatism. As Nisbet (1967) notes, the nature of community, the location of power, the stratification of wealth and privilege, and the role of the individual in emerging mass society are all issues which sociologists attempted to confront. An index of such changes was provided by the proliferation of new words and concepts. Hence terms such as industry, democracy, class, ideology, rationalism, atomistic, masses, collectivism, egalitarian, liberal, conservative, capitalism and bureacracy all emerged as linguistic currency.

The major ideas and frameworks in sociology therefore have roots in both moral and political aspiration. The major sociologists, both classical and modern, have consequently been preoccupied with the implications of Enlightenment thought and with its critics (Callinicos 1999, p. 3). Sociologists including Marx, Weber and Durkheim all sought to transcend a number of dualisms bequeathed by Enlightenment and counter-Enlightenment thinkers (Seidman 1983). Nevertheless, the Age of Reason characterised by ideas such as the individual, progress, contract, nature, reason, did not simply disappear after the conservative challenge during the nineteenth century with its emphasis on traditionalism, communalism and the non-rational. Hence, although the conservative thought-style made a big impact in the social sciences and was partly taken up in the work of Marx, Durkheim and in a different way in Weber,[32] the individualism of the Enlightenment and liberalism remained paramount. The Enlightenment and liberalism furnished and continue to furnish the basis for the dominant epistemological framework which characterises the modern order in both the natural and social sciences.[33] Such a framework not only attempted to provide a neutral description of social reality, but often incorporated within such descriptions an evaluative moral scheme. In the social sciences, this was often typified by an emphasis on individualism, on universals, on explicit normative codes, on abstract forms and by the denigration of tradition, custom and particularity.

The modern context[34]

Having outlined, in terms of the Enlightenment and its reaction, the broad sociological and intellectual legacy which Giddens confronts, as well as the political context which underpinned it, it is also important to examine the immediate political context which shaped Giddens's political habitus or world-view.

From its inception in the 1920s onwards, sociology retained at its foundation a strong liberal viewpoint. As Turner (1992a) argues, many British intellectuals saw their role as educative and opinion forming. Hence, the influential sociological writings of Leonard Hobhouse, Morris Ginsberg, T.H. Marshall and Percy Cohen contained a strong impulse towards political liberalism which was expressed in their emphasis on individual and ethical responsibility and their strong aversion to evolutionary and structural models of social change (Studholme 1997). Nevertheless, following the Second World War, British sociology, reflecting its intermediary position – in historical, cultural and linguistical terms – between the United States and Continental Europe, was formatively shaped by the contextual dynamics of Cold War politics. As Anderson (1977) notes, within this global context, left-liberal intellectuals maintained a peculiar combination of tension and dependence in their relation to both the Soviet Union and capitalism. The Soviet Union represented the only significant breach in an unjust and unequal capitalism in the twentieth century, at one stage encompassing over one-third of the globe. Yet, its 'barbarities', civic and political repression and bureaucracy offered little hope for an increase in human freedom. Conversely, contemporary capitalism, while championing individual freedom as its baseline, generally ignored issues relating to social equality.

Such a political context was refracted through the institutional and curricular development of sociology in Britain within a general context of growing university expansion.[35] The period between the 1950s and 1960s has been characterised by Giddens as one of an 'orthodox consensus' (Giddens 1972c, 1978). Though this characterisation exaggerates the unity of the sociological curriculum, it still has a degree of validity and usefully shows Giddens's own perception of the sociological world. For Giddens, the orthodox consensus embodied two main strands. In contrast to traditional society, it posited a theory of industrial society where class and conflict were disappearing and models of functionalism incorporating unfolding models of social change, progress and order, and a form of naturalism which drew attention to strong parallels between the social and natural sciences (Giddens 1977b, Abrams et al. 1980, p. 4). In this respect Giddens highlights the pivotal role of Talcott Parsons, whose dominance was such that any attempt to come to grips with social theory necessitated a critical engagement with Parsonian functionalism.

As Bourdieu rightly observes, the intellectual field is never a homogeneous social space and, understood as a constellation of relational positions, it is often characterised by differences of power and authority expressed through the opposition between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. Here the distribution within the field corresponds very closely to the distribution of political positions.[36]

In the United States, within a context of growing political radicalism, such a frontal assault on the Parsonian orthodoxy had come earlier, both from the radical left and from the liberal centre. Liberal reworkings of functionalist theories had been initiated by Merton and subsequently pressed further by a more radical Garfinkelian ethnomethodology as well as by writers from the symbolic interactionist tradition inspired by Schutz (Merton 1949, Berger and Luckmann 1966, Garfinkel 1967). For sheer oppositional force and virulent theoretical and political excoriation, the work of two American left-wing radicals, C. Wright-Mills (1959) and Alvin Gouldner (1971), stood out above others.[37] Similarly, in the UK, the most vociferous criticisms of Parsons's work came from 'conflict theorists' – most notably those advanced by Rex (1961), Dahrendorf (1958) and Lockwood (1956). Two major critical themes ultimately emerged from this motley of theoretical standpoints, both of which reflected the political context of rising social conflict, the eruption of student radicalism and a concomitant re-emergence of Marxism.[38] Ethnomethodological and symbolic interactionist critiques focused on the knowledgeability and reflexivity of actors. More overtly political critics on the left emphasised questions of power, conflict and interest.[39]

It is in relation to these writings, which reasserted both the importance of the individual and of power as domination, within a context of growing student radicalism, that Giddens initiated his own criticisms of Parsons's work.[40] His first attack on Parsons constitutes one of his earliest papers (1968b) and derived largely from a 'conflict' theory perspective (Parsons 1967). Giddens's choice of subject was by no means accidental. As Clegg (1989, p. 135) notes, 'Parsons' application of his general analytical framework to the concept of power was a particularly choice target for anyone who wished to score a decisive hit on the corpus of functionalist theory.' His next theoretical challenge was in a series of essays (1970a, 1971b, 1971c, 1972c) and in his first major book, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (1971a), which I will now examine.

SETTING THE SCENE: CAPITALISM AND MODERN SOCIAL THEORY

Perhaps the most crucial text amongst all of Giddens's writings is *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Weber*, which sharply refracts the social, political and theoretical dimensions outlined above. This book, as well as defining or setting the scene for the whole of his subsequent *oeuvre*, is in many ways Giddens's best work. It combines acute scholarship with a systematic attempt to place each of these thinkers in the social and political context within which they wrote.[41]

The implicit frame of reference in *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* was the ongoing critique of Parsons's substantial writings. In his paper '"Power" in the Recent Writings of Talcott Parsons', Giddens had already argued that

> What slips away from sight almost completely in the Parsonian analysis is the very fact that power, even as Parsons defines it, is always exercised over someone! By treating power as necessarily (by definition) legitimate and thus starting from the assumption of consensus of some kind between power-holders and those subordinate to them, Parsons virtually ignores, quite consciously and deliberately, the necessarily hierarchical character of power, and the divisions of interest which are frequently consequent upon it. However much it is true that power can rest upon 'agreement' to code authority which can be used for collective aims, it is also true that interests of power-holders and those subject to that power often clash. (Giddens 1968b, p. 265)

Giddens's next theoretical attack in *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory*, though less explicit in reference, was eminently more thorough and biting. It attempted to displace the Parsonian canon by undermining its roots. Parsons's first book, *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), had laid the foundation for his subsequent theoretical reputation. Its central argument concerned the convergence thesis: that the classical sociological figures, Weber, Durkheim and Pareto, all converged in regard to a 'voluntarist theory of action'.

It was upon this premise that Giddens focused his critique. Although not referring to Parsons directly, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* clearly invokes the Parsonian trinity. However, Giddens's reworking of the canon replaces Pareto with Marx and questions the

voluntarist framework. He also rejects the narrow interpretation of Durkheim and Weber.[42] As he notes in the Preface,

> This book is written in the belief that there is a widespread feeling among sociologists that contemporary social theory stands in need of a radical revision. Such a revision must begin from a reconsideration of the works of those writers who established the principal frames of reference of modern sociology. In this connection, three names rank above all others: Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber. (Giddens 1971a, p. vii)

In addition, Giddens argues that most of the dominant branches of modern social theory can be traced with some modifications and extensions to these three authors:

> Marx's works, obviously, are the primary source of the various forms of contemporary neo-Marxism; Durkheim's writings may be identified as the dominant inspiration lying behind 'structural-functionalism'; and at least some of the modern variants of phenomenology derive, directly or indirectly, from the writings of Max Weber. (ibid., pp. xi–xii)

Thus Giddens introduces Marxism as the central interlocutor for social theory and attempts to merge its insights with what he calls the 'bourgeois sociology' of Weber and Durkheim.[43] He therefore sets out not only to provide a comprehensive analysis of the sociological ideas of each of these three authors, but also to re-examine some of the main points of convergence and divergence between them by using Marx as the principal point of reference. That is, he attempts to evaluate the relationship between Marxism and bourgeois sociology which had come to represent a significant debate in sociology in the 1960s.[44]

The debate during the 1960s incorporated two polarised standpoints. According to the first position, adopted by many Western sociologists, Marx's work belonged to a 'pre-history' of social thought and sociology properly began only with the generation of Durkheim and Weber. The second Marxist position held that the works of this subsequent generation should be seen as a bourgeois-liberal ideological response to Marxism. However, for Giddens both positions were 'dangerously misleading'. Giddens argued that even Marx's own epistemology avoided such a naive reductionism since