

Bryan S. Turner



The Body & Society

Third Edition



The Body & Society

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The Body & Society

Explorations in Social Theory

3rd Edition

Bryan S. Turner



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To Mike Hepworth (1938–2007)
Sociologist and Humorist

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Acknowledgements

Since the original publication of *The Body and Society* in 1984, I have been concerned to provide an ontological grounding to sociological theory, partly because existing theories of social action typically have what one might call a cognitive bias, thereby ignoring the corporeality of human life and the embodiment of the social actor. I have been motivated intellectually to take the quiddity or 'stuffness' of the human condition seriously by addressing human embodiment as a basis for writing about politics, rights and human vulnerability. I had taught a course with Mike Hepworth on body, self and society at the University of Aberdeen in the late 1970s which laid the basis for a co-edited work on *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*. Mike Featherstone and I subsequently co-founded the journal *Body & Society* in 1982 to promote greater awareness of these issues, and in a sense to promote the sociology of the body as a sub-field within the discipline. My approach to corporeality was first developed in the sociology of religion in *Religion and Social Theory* (1983) in which I argued that, unlike anthropology, sociology had not paid sufficient attention to embodiment in understanding religious belief and practice. Employing these concepts of the body and embodiment I sought to give a new foundation to medical sociology in such works as *Medical Power and Social Knowledge* (1987), *Regulating Bodies* (1992) and *The New Medical Sociology* (2004).

Over these three decades, in developing the sociology of the body, I have become increasingly critical of social constructionism as an epistemology. Instead I have explored the damaged human body in various publications and written with Steven Wainwright on the ballet dancer as a criticism of constructionist epistemology. The vulnerability of the human body has increasingly dominated my thinking about embodiment, and I have developed this theme with respect to such diverse topics as injury, old age, disease, and more recently, human rights. The critical intersection between medical science, demography and social change is particularly important as a basis for further developing the sociological understanding of the body in society.

This attempt to provide an ontological grounding for sociological theory is part of a broader project which is to establish the notion of human embodiment as a necessary precondition for any theory of action. Some of these issues were considered in *Society and Culture* (2001) with Chris Rojek, in which we attempted to develop a three-dimensional view of the social, involving embodiment, enselfment and emplacement.

The Body and Society was written in part as a response to the work of Michel Foucault. While many of the issues explored in the first edition – religion, medicine and sexuality – are still relevant, it appears necessary

radically to revisit those concerns and perspectives. In this edition of the book, I have become increasingly interested in time and the body, and this issue of the temporality of the body with respect to illness, ageing and death necessarily leads one to the philosophy of being and time of Martin Heidegger. His preoccupation with boredom provides a stimulating context for thinking sociologically about age and life expectancy.

Many people have directly or indirectly contributed to this new edition: Gary Albrecht, Alex Dumas, Anthony Elliott, Mary Evans, John O'Neill, Chris Rojek, Steven Wainwright, Darin Weinberg, Kevin White, Simon Williams and Zheng Yangwen. Various masters, doctoral and postdoctoral students – Caragh Brosnan, David Larson, Rhiannon Morgan, Ruksana Patel and Nguyen Kim Hoa – have over the years contributed to my sharpening awareness of the centrality of vulnerability to rights, health and politics. I owe a considerable debt to Chris Rojek who has over the years encouraged me to persist with the project of the sociology of the body.

For this third edition I have written a new introduction which surveys some of the developments in the sociology of the body, but more importantly points to new issues such as bio-medical sciences, technology, demography, longevity and human rights. Additions to the text reflect a single thesis, which is that human vulnerability is the foundation of common human experiences and interests, and hence the concept can be employed to question sociology's love affair with cultural relativism.

Chapter 11 outlines my argument that sociologists have rarely concerned themselves with the body-in-motion. This topic is illustrated by some issues in the sociology of dance, which I studied with Steven Wainwright. This research was originally focused on injured ballet dancers and hence on the assumption that ballet careers are compromised by the very vulnerability of the dancing body. The penultimate chapter on the life extension project reflects my current interest in analysing the possible social and psychological implications of any significant extension of human life expectancy. This new concern with ageing has been developed in co-operation with Alex Dumas. In turn, this final preoccupation with ageing reflects my ongoing critical reaction to the idea of the social construction of the body. I am grateful to Darin Weinberg for help in developing a critique of the social construction paradigm. Life extension projects hold out the promise that science can triumph over our human vulnerability but the promise itself threatens to increase human inequality and hence human suffering. Tom Cushman has been important in encouraging me to develop the concept of vulnerability as an approach to the theory of human rights. The results are presented, partially at least, in the final chapter.

A version of Chapter 11 was first published as 'Bodily performance: on aura and reproducibility' in *Body & Society* (2006) vol. 11(4). Aspects of the argument of Chapter 12 appeared as 'Culture, technologies and bodies' in Chris Shilling (ed.) *Embodying Sociology* (2007). The Epilogue, in which I argue that the original metaphors of religious membership – the shepherd

and the sheep – have broken down, but that we need a socio-theology of embodiment if we are to make any sense of our being, was originally one aspect of ‘The end(s) of humanity’ in *The Hedgehog Review*, Summer 2001. All three pieces have been thoroughly rewritten and extensively developed for this third edition.

Introduction to the Third Edition

Virtue and the Body: The Debate over Nature and Nurture

The very existence of the sociology of the body raises an important and perennial problem about the relationship between nature and culture. Although modern sociology has been prone to dismiss 'nature' as merely a construct or has treated it as a cultural system, the tension between the body as a living organism and as a cultural product continues to underpin the sociological understanding of, and debate about, the body and embodiment. There are, of course, strong political reasons for being anxious about the contrast because the nature/nurture divide has often been used to legitimate or to justify social inequality as a natural inequality, such as the (unequal) gender division of labour in society. The ideological justification of this division suggests that men belong to culture and are responsible for the public sphere, while women in their domestic roles fulfil natural functions such as child-rearing and family maintenance. While one can dismiss these claims relatively easily, this distinction needs to be constantly re-assessed since developments in the natural sciences have contributed to a profound change in the ways in which the human body is conceptualized, managed and produced. The contrast between nature and culture also therefore influences the ways in which we think of science itself. We should not take a caricature of the differences between men and women – between the public and the private – as the definitive case against a contrast between nature and culture.

Although the nature/nurture distinction has been a favourite topic of social anthropology, we have somewhat forgotten that the original contrast was an important part of classical philosophy, where nature referred primarily to biological life outside the city and culture was the rational life of the citizen. The contrast between 'mere life' and 'the form of life' within the city was a basic component of the idea of sovereignty. The modern sociological debate about whether the body is natural (outside the city) or socially constructed (under the realm of political sovereignty) has unfortunately become disconnected from the political. If the sociology of the body is to have an important future role in shaping sociological debate, it needs to embrace the relationship between the political and the corporeal as a major research focus.

The original debate around the contrast between nature and nurture, between nature and culture, or between nature and the political was thoroughly explored in classical philosophy. For example, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* there is a decisive distinction between *zoē* as the life which humans share with all living things, and *bios* as the way of life

of a particular person or group (Aristotle, 1998). Similarly, the Stoics recognized a distinction between *physis* (nature) and *nomos* (law). While human beings shared nature with animals, their moral or spiritual well-being could only be realized in the *polis* or the political community in which they could exercise rational discourse, thereby rising above their natural being. A civilized or cultured person is one who has been nurtured by education. When human beings acquire a *hexis* or stable disposition, they can exercise moral virtues and can act in terms of their practical wisdom. Politics exists to ensure the happiness (*eudaimonia*) of its citizens by expanding their excellence in rational action. We should note that in Aristotle's world rational excellence was grounded in a habitus that involved bodily perfection and control. This notion that the *polis* was the environment in which rational men could be fully cultivated has persisted in Western philosophy. For example, in the work of Hannah Arendt there is an articulation of this classical view that the private world is closer to nature (and to deprivation), while the public sphere brings nobility to human actions. Her most influential philosophical work was *The Human Condition* (1958) in which she divided human activities into labour, work and action. She argued that human life can only be meaningful if people can engage effectively in the public sphere. The issue here is that the division between nature and culture or between the body and society is in fact the foundation of political sovereignty. The body also comes to define the space of the political.

This Aristotelian distinction plays an important role in the modern discussion of political sovereignty, pre-eminently in the philosophy of Giorgio Agamben. In his *Homo Sacer*, Agamben argues that the fundamental classification of classical society was not necessarily between the sacred and the profane, but between *physis* (nature) and *nomos* (order), or more precisely between *zoē* or natural life and *bios* or the forms of life. Human beings are essentially animals who have created the polis as a form of political life. Agamben's central interest is in the problematic character of political power of the modern state as sovereignty, which resides in *nomos*, or law, in the ordering (*Ordnung*) of the polis. Nature is characterized by its violence; the polis, by its order, and yet the paradox of sovereignty is that it requires a monopoly of violence. The Hobbesian sovereign overcomes the state of nature by incorporating that violence into its power to order men and things. This idea that the normative authority of sovereign power has to disguise its origins in violence was central to Jacques Derrida's analysis of the paradoxical features of power or force (*Gewalt*). This notion of the paradoxical relationship between law, state and authority ran throughout Derrida's philosophical works from *On Grammatology* (1976) to his later lectures on religion (Derrida and Vattimo, 1998). Derrida's thesis was that, in so far as the law is a command of the state and in so far as the state has a monopoly of force in a given territory, then the legitimacy of the law requires that the origins of law have to be disguised. Law pretends to have no history and no context; it is a form of pure

authority. If law has its historical origins in state violence, how can law be an ordering of violence without itself being an instance of arbitrary violence?

The contemporary debate about the exact nature of political life that has occupied modern philosophy for some decades has been engaged with the legacy of Carl Schmitt (1996). Writing in the context of the erosion of authority in the liberal Weimar state, Schmitt defined sovereignty as an exception to the law, and as the capacity to declare that an emergency exists. The state had the power to bring about order in the face of an emergency by exercising its monopoly of violence. Schmitt was a student of Weber's political sociology, which distinguished two forms of power – symbolic and physical (Weber, 1978). The Church is that institution that has symbolic power to order society and individual lives, operating through forms of ritual and discipline to control souls. The state is that institution that has a monopoly of violence in a given territory, operating through law and coercion to police bodies. Adhering to a positive theory of law, Weber defined law as the command of the state. Under what conditions are laws legitimate? When they are issued by the authority of the state, then they have legality, but Weber could not ultimately solve the dual problems of legality and legitimacy of state power. Schmitt, in the context of the Weimar crisis, raised some awkward issues for liberal parliamentary democracy, and rewrote the rule of law as rule by decree in his *Legality and Legitimacy* (2004) by allocating extraordinary powers to the office of the President, thereby paving the way for Hitler's 'leadership-democracy' (*führer-demokratie*).

In his analysis of violence and the sovereignty of the state, Agamben belongs to this tradition of political thought that includes Weber and Schmitt. He is also deeply influenced by Michel Foucault's theory of 'biopolitics' and his idea of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 2000). Sociologists have recognized the importance of Foucault's concept of governmentality as a paradigm for understanding the micro-processes of administration and control within which self discipline and social regulation are integrated. The concept of governmentality, which appears late in Foucault's political writing, provides an integrating theme that addressed the socio-political practices or technologies by which the self is constructed through discipline. Governmentality has become the common foundation of modern political rationality in which the administrative systems of the state have been extended in order to maximize productive control over the demographic processes of the population. This extension of administrative rationality was first concerned with demographic processes of birth, morbidity and death, and later with the psychological health of the population. The administrative state has made eugenics an essential feature of modern government, despite the fact that the very word 'eugenics' is normally hidden from view, given its bad historical connections with fascism and genocide. Governmentality ultimately refers to the ways in which bodies are produced, cultivated and disciplined.

As a generic term for these micro-power relations whereby bodies are controlled by the state through local institutions and authorities, governmentality has been defined as 'the ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security' (Foucault, 2001: 219–20). The importance of this definition is that historically the power of the modern state has been less concerned with sovereignty over things (land and wealth) and more concerned with maximizing the productive power of populations, the human body and reproduction. Furthermore, Foucault interpreted the exercise of administrative power in positive terms, that is as enhancing a population's potential through state support for the family and reproduction. The state's involvement in, and regulation of, reproductive technology is a further example of governmentality in which the desire of couples to reproduce is enhanced through the state's support of new medical technologies. In these examples, the eugenic policies of the state are implicit or hidden within the benign interventions of the general practitioner, the social worker or the marriage counsellor. In these administrative arrangements, birth and death become key events in the exercise of state power at the level of everyday life.

To this discussion of sovereignty, we must add the analysis of space. One distinction between religion and politics, between sacred and sovereign, is the question of the territorialization of power. This question of space is nicely illustrated by the distinction between *Ordnung* and *Ortung*. In his account of sovereignty, Agamben (1998: 19) argues that what is at stake is the definition of space within which the juridico-political order can have validity. He goes on to argue that the state of emergency has been historically illustrated by the concentration camp, starting with the use of such camps by the British in the war against the Boers, and then by the Nazi concentration camp. This site of detention is one in which law is suspended and the inmates exist without the protection of rights. For Agamben, the state of emergency has become a normal method of the exercise of sovereignty, even by liberal democracies.

His arguments have been highly controversial because he claims that the Patriot Act recognized a state of emergency and that Guantanamo Bay has the same legal and political status as the Nazi concentration camps. When the state of emergency becomes permanent in a war against terrorism, then the city becomes a camp, and the inmates of these extra-judicial zones are exposed to 'bare life', that is they are expelled from *bios* to *zoē*. These camps offer the state the opportunity of indefinite containment for anybody who is deemed to be a potential threat (Butler, 2006). The principle of indefinite detention which Guantanamo expresses means that the camp offers the state a strategy of political storage whereby, even were the inmates to be tried and found not guilty, they could still be detained. In this sense, the inmates are in a state of permanent storage.

Greek philosophy established a distinction which we still recognize, namely between human behaviour that is determined either by instinct (nature) or by virtue (nurture). This contrast in Greek philosophy was subsequently embraced by Christian theology, especially by St Augustine, who proposed that human beings were citizens of two cities, an earthly city dominated by passion and violence, and a 'city of God' in which their true spiritual beings could be realized. Christian teaching attempted to subordinate human nature (the passions or desires) by moral training, confession and discipline (or cultivating the soul). Christianity established a set of disciplines – or technologies of the self (Foucault, 1997a) – that were designed to regulate the natural man through ascetic regulation, primarily in the form of diet. By abstinence, the religious could transcend the limitations of the animal life of desire. Laymen were to a large degree ensnared in natural desire, but various institutions of grace – confession, Eucharist, baptism and the last rites – offered partial relief from these tribulations. In particular, marriage provided some regulation of natural sexual drives which could be channelled through holy matrimony to some beneficial purpose, namely reproduction.

Traditional religious teaching on the family in the West obviously depends on the biblical view of sexuality, marriage and reproduction. In view of the authority of the New Testament, it is important to recognize that Jesus had very little to say about marriage and family life, and in general his observations on sexual relationships were limited. By comparison with Jewish teaching at the time, Jesus appears to have taken little direct interest in the family and marriage. The Gospels do not therefore contain a developed or systematic theology of this-worldly institutions such as marriage, the family, inheritance and divorce. In order to discover what the teaching of the early Church was on marriage and family life, we need to turn to the letters of St Paul to the primitive church. These epistles to the early Christian communities, such as the letters to the Corinthians, were essentially ad hoc responses to specific local issues, but they have come to acquire a clear authority. Paul's teachings precluded divorce and if the couple did separate, they were not permitted to remarry. In recognizing that celibacy was superior to marriage, he created a new hierarchy of virtue: virginity, widowhood and marriage. Throughout subsequent Christian history, virginity became a significant test of sanctity. For example, the claims of Joan of Arc to sainthood rested significantly on her reputation for virginity (Warner, 1981).

Of course the Christian view that nature had to be subdued if the life of the spirit was to flourish, had its roots in Old Testament views of gender and gender differences. Christianity inherited the traditional Middle Eastern assumption that women, because they are closer to nature, are inferior to men. In the Genesis story, the serpent tempts Eve, and subsequently Adam and Eve recognizing that they are naked are forced to cover the genitals with the leaves of a fig tree. One thing that distinguishes humans from animals is human modesty; humans need to cover nature (genitals, hair or the face)

with culture (the loin cloth, the head scarf or the veil). In some cultures, eating is also assumed to have animal connections, and hence it is polite to cover the mouth while eating. One could list a whole series of activities – defecation, copulation, mastication and so forth – which have strong animal or natural connotations and where human societies have the cultural need to hide or disguise such activities. In the Christian view anything that comes out of the body, especially any involuntary secretion, has the potential to defile a person. Children need training or nurturing in order to understand what behaviour is considered uncivilized and needs to be controlled, hidden or suppressed.

Western positivist philosophy reversed the relationship between nature and culture, arguing that human nature determines mental and cultural existence. Empiricism and materialism attempt to demonstrate that mental life is determined, often mechanistically, by our material organic life. The development of a mechanistic dualism between mind and body, or between mental and material causation, is often historically associated with René Descartes and Francis Bacon. Cartesianism rejected the speculative scholarship of mediaeval philosophy, and paved the way towards rationalism and empirical scientific experimentation. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century laid the foundations of experimental (laboratory) science in which scientists attempted to explain human behaviour by reference to human anatomy, or biology or chemistry. For example, in the eighteenth century medical scientists became interested in the theory that human diet determines human behaviour. Physicians such as George Cheyne attempted to explain the prevalence of suicide in England in terms of poor diet, and developed various dietary regimes for sedentary occupations to guard against obesity or depression, a condition known at the time as ‘the English malady’. Cheyne’s dietary recommendations influenced religious leaders including John Wesley, who felt that these dietary recommendations were especially compatible with the requirements of Christianity for discipline.

Diet has in fact a double meaning – the political government of a sovereign body and the government of a human body (Turner, 1982a,b). There is both a dietary regimen and a political regime. In the late nineteenth century, the discovery of the calorific scale allowed scientists to calculate with considerable precision the intake of food that was required for a given output of human labour. Dietetics was subsequently used to improve the efficiency of the military, and to make the management of prisons more rational. Dietetics sought to give some scientific foundation to the traditional proverb that a man is what he eats. In the modern world, advanced societies have become obsessed with the problem of clinical obesity as a cause of depression, death and morbidity. The incidence of diabetes has greatly increased with the greying of the populations of the advanced industrial societies. There are, in addition, various arguments from nutritional science that various products, especially sugar, produce uncontrollable behaviour in children. The so-called hyperactive child is a syndrome that has been

connected with the presence of artificial agents – colouring for example – in food. In short, the dietary management of the child by parents is often thought to be as important as education in the upbringing of children. These contemporary attempts to explain offensive or criminal behaviour by reference to genetics or diet can be seen as the modern legacy of nineteenth-century positivist criminology.

In the seemingly endless debate over whether inheritance or social environment was the causal framework within which criminal behaviour was to be adequately explained, Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) claimed from his own observations of the physical composition of known criminals that there was a definite ‘criminal type’. More importantly, the criminal was an atavistic specimen – a throwback to a pre-social figure whose stooping frame, large hands and low brow marked him out as different from a law-abiding citizen. The criminal was born, not socialized within a deviant environment. He belonged to *zoē* not to *bios*, that is to ‘bare life’ rather than to the *polis*.

Lombroso’s positivistic criminology promised to resolve definitively the puzzle of criminal behaviour, and more importantly it claimed to be demonstrably grounded in a scientific methodology that delivered unambiguous results. Criminal Man had stigmata that could be read by the criminologist with the same clarity as reading an English text. Nineteenth-century positivism was a deterministic and reductionist doctrine that departed from the classical tradition of criminology, which had been much more closely associated with legal theory, the doctrine of free will and philosophical liberalism.

What is striking, however, about criminology at the close of the century was the concentration not so much on the criminal type but on the notion of feeble-mindedness in the criminal personality. Crime was a consequence, not of the robust atavistic man, but of the feeble-minded simpleton who could not cope independently with the exigencies of urban life in a social world that was rapidly changing. The real social problem with the feeble-minded criminal was his unfortunate capacity to reproduce. If the feeble-minded man had been infertile, he would have been less problematic in the social landscape of late Victorian Britain. The criminal type within the Victorian moral framework was not so much a vicious and dangerous character, but a sad and pathetic figure who required regulation and restraint, and medical guidance.

With the growth of evolutionary theory in nineteenth-century biology and zoology, two incompatible views of mankind emerged. ‘Monogenism’ – the belief that the diverse races of mankind had a single or common origin, but had degenerated at different rates with the progress of humanity – was compatible with the myth of Adam as the Father of Mankind in Genesis. By contrast, ‘polygenism’ was supported by secular rationalists who argued that human races have separate origins and different attributes, and that humanity was characterized by its extreme diversity. Polygenism was attractive to rational humanism and had no support in Old Testament mythology. While neither argument was politically

egalitarian, polygenism was more consistently used, for example in the United States in the nineteenth century, as a justification for racial inequality. Charles Darwin's biological theory of evolution was eventually transformed into social Darwinism, which claimed that human societies were based on endless struggles resulting in the 'survival of the fittest'. The ethical idea of the unity of mankind that had been the basis of Natural Law appeared to have been irreparably shattered by the progress of scientific knowledge.

Social Darwinism attempted to show that natural selection in the evolutionary development of society provided a causal account of the development of personality traits, and that the educational nurturing of new generations was less significant than the natural selection of behaviour that was related to evolutionary adaptation. Natural causes – the survival of the fittest – were more important than human socialization. Evolutionary psychology attempts to show that our contemporary psychological make-up, such as aggressiveness in human males, is a consequence of our evolutionary adaptation to our environment, for example as hunters and gatherers.

While physical anthropology supported nature over nurture, social anthropology and early sociology generally rejected such naturalistic explanations of human behaviour, arguing that culture is the most significant component of any explanation of both individual behaviour and social organization. Social anthropology has rejected biological reductionism on two grounds. First, it argued that the very distinction between nature and culture is itself a cultural distinction. What counts as 'nature' or 'natural' in human societies is infinitely variable, and the task of sociology and anthropology is to understand these variations. For example, the dividing line between nature and nurture can be explored in terms of what and how people eat food. Not all food is regarded as 'naturally' appropriate for human consumption. Because Western societies tend to regard domestic animals as possessing certain minimal rights, we are reluctant to eat them. The domesticated dog may be a delicacy in Hanoi, but not in Harlow. By contrast, while we relish a side of English beef, Hinduism regards the cow as sacred. Pork is relished by Filipino Christians but not by the Muslims of Mindanao. These anthropological arguments, which in themselves are well known, seek to show that the distinction between nature and culture or nature and nurture is itself contingent, historical and cultural.

Secondly, social anthropology has attempted to demonstrate through comparative ethnographic research that 'human nature' varies between cultures and hence there is no common generic nature to humanity. Perhaps the most famous example of this approach is from the work of Margaret Mead who demonstrated that even the gender division of society cannot be explained by heredity. She published a number of books – *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928), *Growing Up in New Guinea* (1930) and *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies* (1935) – in which she showed that many societies were very tolerant of sexual experimentation outside of marriage for young adults, and furthermore that there is an important difference between gender, sex and sexuality.

In some societies men stay at home and concentrate on personal cosmetic beauty and women undertake manual work. Therefore, masculinity cannot be explained by reference to biology. Gender refers to the social roles which people occupy that are produced by a gender division of labour; sex refers to biological sex and sexualities refer to the performance of gender identities.

Arnold Gehlen and the Theory of Institutions

Modern mainstream sociology came to reject the idea that social phenomena can be explained causally by reference to natural phenomena, and yet sociology has been influenced, somewhat indirectly, by the legacy of philosophical anthropology, which had a very different interpretation of human nature in relation to institutions. Much of the recent work on the sociology of the body has been explicitly influenced by Peter Berger and therefore implicitly by the philosophy of Arnold Gehlen who is now widely recognized as the founder of 'philosophical anthropology'. Concerned with the relationships between biology, environment and institutions, Gehlen was influenced by contemporary developments in biological science and by Friedrich Nietzsche. Offering an original perspective on the conventional nature/nurture debate, his philosophical thought is controversial, partly because he was closely associated with National Socialism. His philosophical anthropology has had a lasting impact on the sociology of knowledge, especially in the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. Gehlen has also been particularly important in the development of social philosophy in Germany where his influence on Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, Hans Joas, Wolfgang Ilegies and Niklas Luhmann is significant. A neoconservative, his thought has had a direct impact on radical socialist criticism of modernity.

Following Nietzsche, Gehlen (1988) argued that human beings are not yet finished animals. Man, to use Gehlen's terminology and the title of the English translation of his major work, is, by comparison with other animals, a 'deficient being'. By this notion, he meant that human beings are poorly equipped biologically to cope with the world into which they are involuntarily thrown. They have no finite or specific instinctual equipment to a given environment, and require a long period of education in order to adapt themselves to the social world. This state of incompleteness compels them to become creatures of discipline, because their very survival requires self-discipline, training and self-correction. In order to manage their world openness, human beings have to create a cultural world to replace or to supplement their instinctual legacy. Ontological incompleteness provides an anthropological explanation for the human origins of social institutions. In this sense, we can define 'philosophical anthropology' as a perspective that employs the findings of anthropology and human biology to address traditional philosophical problems concerning ontology.

A theory of institutions is the core of Gehlen's work. Human beings are characterized by their 'instinctual deprivation' and therefore humans do not have a stable structure within which to operate. Social institutions are the bridges between humans and their physical environment, and it is through these institutions that human life becomes coherent, meaningful and continuous. In filling the gap created by instinctual deprivation, institutions provide humans with relief (*Entlastung*) from the tensions generated by undirected instinctual drives. Habit is a central aspect of relief, because it reduces expenditure in motivation and control in everyday life. Habit defines the contours of a taken-for-granted social reality.

Over time, these institutions merge into the background assumptions of social action and the foreground is occupied by reflexive, practical and conscious activities. With modernization, there is a process of de-institutionalization with the result that the background becomes less reliable, more open to negotiation, increasingly precarious and routinely an object of reflection. Accordingly, the foreground expands and life is experienced as risky and unpredictable. With a process of de-traditionalization, objective and sacred institutions suffer erosion, and modern life becomes subjective, contingent and uncertain. In fact we occupy a world of secondary or quasi-institutions, which are fragile and subject to constant change. Institutions, which are exposed to persistent reflection, cannot provide humans with necessary psychological relief. There are profound consequences associated with these changes. While primitive human beings had character, that is a firm and definite psychological structure corresponding to reliable background institutions, in modern societies people have personalities that are fluid and flexible, like the institutions in which they exist.

Gehlen's work developed into a profoundly conservative social criticism of modernity. While the fundamental premises of the Enlightenment are dead, their consequences continue. With modernization, society as a system has become separated from the cultural and value assumptions of modern technology, science, economics and state. While the transformation of technology is a restless and hectic activity, culture has crystallized because its transformative capacities have already been realized. The exterior appearance of excoriating social change masks the underlying crystallization of culture.

His work has also been, somewhat paradoxically, important in the development of social constructionism. Because human beings live in a state of world openness, they have to construct their human world culturally through building social institutions. However, human beings cannot remain persistently reflexive about this social construction, and the social world must take on a taken-for-granted factual character. Gehlen's social philosophy is conservative because institutions are necessary and it is psychologically dangerous constantly to criticize these institutional supports. Critical reflexivity undermines the capacity of social institutions to survive as 'natural' features of the everyday world. His theory underlined the

importance of order and stability, and hence he treated all forms of social change as corrosive.

Human incompleteness provides an anthropological explanation for the human origins of social institutions. In short, human behaviour is conditioned by institutions not instincts. Gehlen's work has been important in the development of contemporary sociology especially in, for example, Peter Berger (1980). For Berger, human beings have to create cultural institutions ('a sacred canopy') in order to give their world some structure and stability (1967). With Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966) was one of the most influential discussions of culture in modern sociology. Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge can therefore be seen as a response to the traditional nature/nurture debate.

Social Constructionism

Constructionism – the philosophical idea that things are not discovered but socially produced – is a perspective that has been applied within both the natural and social sciences. In one sense, sociology is constructionism, in so far as sociologists argue that what appear to be naturally occurring phenomena are in fact products of social processes. Constructionism invites us to presume that all facts are necessarily social facts in the sense that social communities produce them. In contemporary sociology, the notion of constructionism has become influential as a theoretical orientation because developments in the theory of language (the so-called 'the linguistic turn') have forced social scientists to re-assess the legacy of naturalistic empiricism.

Empiricism argues that our senses are our best guide to what exists and can be known. Naturalistic empiricism claims that our senses are our best guide to knowledge about nature. Social constructionism raises serious criticisms about the reliability of such evidence of the senses, claiming that culture determines how we apprehend and comprehend the world. Our knowledge of the natural and social world is determined or constructed by background cultural assumptions.

Constructionism is often associated with the notion that social reality is a narrative or text. This idea of society as narrative has become a persuasive paradigm in cultural sociology, and has changed the conventional methodologies of social inquiry. The debate about the construction of social reality has for example been important in sociological approaches to the human body. The history of anatomical maps of the human body – a text about the structure of the body – shows how the anatomy of the body has been constructed according to changing medical fashions. How scientists see the body is dependent on their cultural framework and is not simply based on direct empirical observation.

Several criticisms of social constructionism can be considered. First, it is a mistake to assume that social constructionism represents one single,

more or less coherent, doctrine. There are in fact a great variety of different and contradictory constructionist perspectives. Different types of constructionism present very different accounts of human agency, and thus have different implications for an understanding of social relationships. Secondly, constructionism tends to ignore or deny the importance of the phenomenological world. This issue is especially important in the debate about the social construction of the body. Cultural representations of the body are historical, but there is also an experience of embodiment that can only be understood by grasping the body as a lived experience. Constructionism does not allow us to analyse the phenomenology of the everyday world, including the body, and by insisting on the textuality of phenomena it does not provide a vocabulary for studying human performance or human experience. Sociologists may argue, for example, that dental science constructs the mouth as an objective of scientific inquiry, but this tells us nothing about the phenomenology of the experience of toothache.

A third criticism is that constructionism as a cultural theory does not ask whether some social phenomena are more socially constructed than others. If society is an ensemble of texts, are all texts of equal importance, and how can we judge their significance? Is gout less socially constructed than homosexuality? Constructionist arguments tend to be employed when a condition such as a disability is politically disputed. Constructionism is often a basis for political advocacy, for example in the women's movement where it was used to argue that 'anatomy is not destiny'. Constructionism shares these problems with earlier forms of the sociology of knowledge, namely the problem of how one measures or understands the social effects of discourses, texts or statements regarded as 'ideological' or socially constructed. Theories of ideology (and by extension theories of social construction) have not been particularly successful in showing that a pervasive set of beliefs has consistent effects or consequences on belief and practice such that it could be said to constitute a dominant ideology or a dominant discourse. Without a more robust research methodology, sociological interpretations of social texts have the same force or lack of it as literary interpretations. There is an important sociological difference between claiming, for example, that anorexia is socially constructed, and exploring the intended and unintended consequences of anorexia in the lives of individuals.

In the last 20 years, the traditional nature and nurture debate has become submerged under or incorporated within the development of the sociology of the body. Sociologists have argued predominantly that the human body, far from being a given natural phenomenon, is, according to constructionism, a product of social processes of interpretation and fabrication. Following Marcel Mauss (1979) sociologists have noted that the human body needs to be trained to undertake basic activities – walking, running, dancing or sitting. Different cultures have different body techniques which must be mastered if the child is to be accepted into society – for example, eating with chopsticks in Japan or not spitting in public in Victorian England. The work

of Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1984) has been important in demonstrating that the human body has to be trained to occupy a habitus within which the individual acquires an appropriate deportment that is shaped by social class. The shape and dispositions of the body are the products of a cultural habitus within the specific location of a certain social class. The natural dispositions are cultivated in the habitus – an idea that Bourdieu adapts from Aristotle – where individuals acquire a socially constructed taste for objects that have cultural capital. We can re-interpret Bourdieu as saying that primitive or raw desires (nature) are reconstituted in the habitus (nurture) where they emerged as socially sanctioned tastes or preferences.

More recently, this traditional argument in favour of culture has been once more challenged by the findings of genetic research. In public discourse, it is often claimed that there is a gene to explain some aspect of human behaviour – such as a divorce gene to show why some people are prone to divorce or a God gene to show why some people are more prone to spiritual experiences than others. These popular notions are often challenged by genetic scientists who claim that the causal connection between genes and human behaviour is more complex and can rarely be reduced to the effect of a single gene. The new genetics has clearly made important strides in explaining the prevalence of certain specific diseases such as Huntington's Disease, but it has been unable to achieve similar results in the explanation of complex human behaviour such as criminality. However, these new developments in genetics do open up innovative opportunities for a more sophisticated dialogue between social science and genetics, and hence it is premature to dismiss the debate around nature and nurture. One consequence of modern applications of genetic research such as stem-cell therapy has been to raise the question as to whether life expectancy – an issue which I explore in Chapter 12 – can be increased significantly. The prospect of a significant extension of life has implications for the nature of our humanity, opening up the prospect of post-human existence (Fukuyama, 2002), and behind the prospect of prolongevity is the underlying problem of, paradoxically, increasing our vulnerability as creatures at the very point of defying death.

Vulnerability

The notion of vulnerability is derived from the Latin *vulnus* or 'wound' (Turner, 2006). Its etymology signifies the human potential to be open to the world and hence to be wounded, that is to experience physical trauma. In modern usage, the idea of human vulnerability refers to both physical and psychological harm: it indicates human exposure to psychological harm or moral damage or spiritual threat. More generally it includes our ability to suffer psychologically, morally and spiritually rather than merely a physical capacity for pain from our exposure to the physical world. Our common human vulnerability is illustrated by our morbidity and mortality, and these

in turn can be regarded as the basis for shared human rights, such as the right to life itself.

The modern revulsion against physical torture in international legal codes illustrates the common theme of vulnerability running through universal human rights declarations. In referring to hazards and disasters, these conventions draw attention to the risky relationship between people and their natural environments. Various disasters in modern times – Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami disaster, the Kobe earthquake and African droughts – have encouraged governments and international agencies to seek improved measures of risks and vulnerabilities.

In an information society, vulnerability has acquired yet another meaning, referring in computer sciences to the weakness in a system in permitting an attacker to compromise the integrity and security of a system, its data and its applications.

Vulnerability is perhaps most closely associated with what appears to be the inevitable ageing of the human organism. With the aging of populations in developed societies, the leading causes of death have changed from infectious disease in infants to geriatric conditions – stroke, heart attack and cancer – among the elderly. For instance, the American Heart Association has identified several risk factors associated with heart disease such as increasing age, male sex, and heredity. There are also life-style factors which make people vulnerable such as smoking, physical inactivity, obesity and diabetes mellitus. Psychologists in the 1950s argued that there was an ‘executive disease’ among white-collar employees in the corporate world. American cardiologists claimed that type-A men were competitive and ambitious, and their corporate life-style made them vulnerable to heart attack as a consequence of high levels of stress. Medical debate has concentrated on assessing whether vulnerability to disease is produced by environmental factors (such as pollution) which can be modified by legislation and political intervention or whether the primary causes are genetic, where medical intervention (such as genetic counselling for Huntington’s Disease) involves long-term strategies. The evidence suggests that disease is a product of both environmental and genetic causes, and requires appropriate strategies to address both social and genetic dimensions.

With globalization there is greater interconnectivity between societies, making the rapid spread of infectious disease more problematic. With technological development, the risks of industrial pollution and hazard are much greater. With growing sophistication in military technology, the risk of intended and unintended military disaster is also much greater. In short, with modern social change, human vulnerability and institutional precariousness increase. These social and technological changes were summarized in the concept of ‘risk society’ (Beck, 1992). Reflecting on the impact of uncertainty, risk and hazard, Beck developed a sociological perspective to show why disasters such as Bhopal, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and global warming were products of modernization involving

the intensive application of technology to transform the environment to satisfy human needs. Such risks were the unintended consequences of technological modernization.

These Aristotelian themes – body, habitus and virtue – have also been important in the development of the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In summary, there are broadly two dominant traditions in the sociology of the body. There is either the cultural decoding of the body as a system of meaning that has a definite structure existing separately from the intentions and conceptions of individuals, or there is the phenomenological study of embodiment that attempts to understand human practices that are organized around the life course (of birth, maturation, reproduction and death). Sociologists including Bourdieu have offered various solutions to this persistent tension between meaning and experience on the one hand, and between representation and practice on the other. Bourdieu's development of the notions of habitus and practice in *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) provides a theoretical strategy for looking simultaneously at how status difference is inscribed on the body and how we experience the world through our bodies that are ranked in terms of their cultural capital. The reconciliation of these traditions can be assisted by distinguishing between the idea of the body as representation, and embodiment as practice and experience.

In considering the future development of the sociology of the body, there are at least two important issues. There is a general view that, while there has been an extensive theoretical debate, there is a dearth of empirical ethnographic research. Secondly, there is a growing research interest in performance, offering further empirical grounding for the study of the body. For example, to study ballet as performance rather than as representation, sociologists need to pay attention to the performing body. In *Performing Live*, Richard Shusterman (2000), drawing on the work of Bourdieu and developing a pragmatist aesthetics, has argued that an aesthetic understanding of performance such as hip hop cannot neglect the embodied features of artistic activity. The need for an understanding of embodiment and lived experience is crucial in understanding performing arts, but also for the study of the body in sport. While choreography is in one sense the text of the dance, performance takes place outside the strict directions of the choreographic work and analysis. Dance has an immediacy which cannot be captured by discourse analysis. It is important to re-capture the intellectual contribution of the phenomenology of human embodiment in order to avoid the reduction of bodies to cultural texts. My presumption is that the concept of embodiment must be placed at the core of any adequate picture of social life, and that a renewal of the critical project of sociology depends on a theoretical integration of the connections between the vulnerability of human embodiment, the precarious nature of social institutions and human rights. The richness of metaphors of embodiment is never very far from an effective conceptualization of institutions. The fact that the body is important to the metaphors we use to think with has been commonly recognized in social anthropology from Robert Hertz to Mary Douglas.

Let us consider religious mythology. Because the body is traditionally always the nearest to hand source of metaphors for understanding society, it is hardly surprising, for example, that Christian theology has been constructed around body metaphors: virgin birth, charisma as blood, Adam's Rib, Mary's milk, Christ's wounds, the Sacred Heart and the Eucharistic Feast. It is also the case that basic social theories have also been corporeal. Feasts provided an elementary model of society and the Church was conceptualized as a body of believers. From the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ came early models of trading groups as corporations. The body is, however, more than a rich source of metaphor. It is constitutive of our being-in-the-world, but in contemporary societies the dominance of bio-technology has brought about an erosion of any sense of our common ontology. The metaphors by which we can think about society have become either irrelevant or exhausted, and we live in societies in which the common stream of metaphorical meanings is constantly challenged by scientific change. As a conclusion to this third edition of *The Body and Society* I turn to the issue of the possibility of a theological imagination of body and society.

The Mode of Desire

Needs and Desires

Human beings are often thought to have needs because they have bodies. Our basic needs are thus typically seen as physical: the need to eat, sleep and drink is a basic feature of people or organic systems. It is also in social philosophy to recognize needs which are not overtly physical, for example the need for companionship or self-respect. 'Need' implies 'necessity', for the failure to satisfy needs results in impairment, malfunction and displeasure. The satisfaction of a need produces pleasure as a release from the tension of an unresolved need. The result is that 'need' is an explanatory concept in a theory of motivation which argues that behaviour is produced by the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. In Greek philosophy, the Cyrenaics and Epicureans placed great emphasis on the satisfaction of pleasures as a criterion of the good life. In utilitarianism, the notion of the hedonistic calculus became the basis of Bentham's political philosophy: the good society is one which maximizes the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The problem is that not all pleasures appear to be necessary and many of them appear to be destructive and anti-social. Human capacity for pleasures appears infinite, including self-flagellation, homosexual rape, torture, plunder and pillage. The philosophical solution has been to distinguish between good and bad pleasures, between real and false needs. For example, the outcome of the debate about pleasure and virtue in Greek philosophy was that 'we should try to live a frugal life in which necessary desires are satisfied, and natural but not necessary desires given some place, while vain desires are outlawed. Such a life would naturally be virtuous' (Huby, 1969: 67). While a person may gain sadistic pleasure from the pain of others, these pleasure-giving activities are not regarded as conducive to a good society based on companionship and these pleasures are thus regarded as vain and unnatural. There are at least two problems with this position. The first is that I am an authority on my own pleasures and therefore individuals may not be easily persuaded that their private pleasures are somehow false. Secondly, the argument equates 'desire' with 'need'.

Although the analysis of desire has a long history in philosophy (Potts, 1980) and although 'desire' is often associated with 'appetite', it is important to be clear that a theory of desire is not the same as a theory of need. For example, Freud's psychoanalysis was primarily a theory of desire

and cannot be translated into a Marxist anthropology which is essentially a theory of need. The difference is that need implies an object which satisfies the need, the object of the need being external to it; desire cannot be finally satisfied since desire is its own object. The view of desire provides the basis of Freudian pessimism, because desire cannot be satisfied within society. The Oedipus myth signals this impossibility. The satisfaction of needs can be the criterion of the good society, whereas the satisfaction of desire cannot. *Concupiscentia* and *ira* are thus corrosive of that friendship which the Greeks saw as the cement of social groups as well as the basis of individual virtue.

Wisdom and Friendship

Sociology is literally the wisdom or knowledge (*logos*) of friendship (*socius*). The task of sociology is to analyse the processes which bind and unbind social groups, and to comprehend the location of the individual within the network of social regulations which tie the individual to the social world. While sociology is a relatively new addition to the social sciences, the notion that friendship is the ultimate social cement of large-scale social collectivities, like the state, is relatively ancient. In *The Symposium* Plato gave full expression to the Greek ideal of friendship as that social condition which overcomes the anti-social desires for personal possessions and competitive eminence. The aim of the individual and the state should be the cultivation of virtue and happiness rather than the satisfaction of desires which are the springs of disharmony and envy. The order (*kosmos*) within the individual is necessary to the ordering (*kosmos*) within the large social world and both are intimately connected to friendship. It was Eros which was the force capable of bridging the gap between the two essential elements of reality – rationality embodied in Apollo and irrationality embodied in Dionysus (Jaeger, 1944). The interior of the individual reflects the anatomy of society as a contest between desires (of which envy is especially prominent), and reason (Gouldner, 1967). Both Eros and friendship are necessary to fuse these disruptive and corrosive features of the psyche and society. We can see then that the roots of Western philosophy lie in two related issues: the struggle between desire and reason, and the opposition between the binding of friendship and the unbinding pressures of individuation.

There is much that separates Plato's philosophical enquiry into the nature of friendship and the sociological analysis of social bonding, but, as I shall show, there is also much continuity. More importantly, the world in which Plato existed has been transformed by two events which are crucial to this particular study: Christianity and the industrial revolution. Given the strong chiliastic dimension of early Christianity, the primitive church posed a sharp and decisive opposition between the world and the spirit. The cultivation of the body could have no place within a religious movement which was initially strongly oriented towards the things of the

next world. Early Christianity may have inherited from gnostic Essenism the view that creation was corrupt and worthy of moral condemnation (Allegro, 1979). After the destruction of Jerusalem and the absence of the Messianic Return, the Christian church was forced to accommodate to the existence of Roman imperialism, but it retained what Weber called inner-worldly asceticism, that is a strong hostility to the things of this world. To some extent the emphasis in Pauline theology on the sinfulness of sex was reinforced by the adoption of Aristotelian philosophy which was similarly hostile to women.

Within the Christian ascetic tradition, sexuality came to be seen as largely incompatible with religious practice. In particular, sexual enjoyment is a particular threat to any attempt to create a systematic religious response to sinfulness. This problem of subordinating sexuality to a rational life-style forms the basis of much of Weber's view of the origins of religious intellectualism and rationalization. The argument is that 'ascetic alertness, self-control, and methodical planning of life are seriously threatened by the peculiar irrationality of the sexual act, which is ultimately and uniquely unsusceptible to rational organization' (Weber, 1966: 238). One 'solution' to this dilemma of human existence was the division of the religious community as an elite which withdrew from the world in order to abstain from sexuality and the mass which remained embedded in the profane world of everyday society. The laity reproduced itself within the restrictions of organized monogamy. The elite withdrew into celibacy and monasticism, recruiting its members through vocations rather than carnal reproduction. Sexuality, even within the limitations placed upon family life by religious norms, was thus a lay activity, permitting monks and priests to follow a life of rational control over the flesh. As a result of this severity towards sexual sinfulness, the human body was transformed from the occasion for sin to its very cause. The body became the prison of the soul, the flesh became, in the words of Brother Giles, the pig that wallows in its own filth and the senses were the seven enemies of the mind (Black, 1902). To control the body, the ascetic movement in Christianity turned ever more rigidly towards rituals of restraint – fasting, celibacy, vegetarianism and the denial of earthly things.

The Mode of Desire

It is possible to conceive of a mode of desire corresponding to every economic mode of production. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Engels (n.d.) argued that, within the materialist perspective of history, every society has to produce its means of existence and reproduce its own members. An order of sexuality thus corresponds to an order of property and production. The mode of desire is a set of social relations by which sexual desire is produced, regulated and distributed under a system of kinship, patriarchy and households. These relations of desire determine the eligibility of persons for procreative roles and legitimate sexual unions for