Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis

Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life

Gibson Burrell
Lecturer in the Department of Behaviour in Organisations, University of Lancaster, England

Gareth Morgan
Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Industrial Relations, York University, Toronto

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Introduction

This book, which has devoured the last two years of our lives, is the product of a friendship and intellectual partnership. It began as an innocuous idea which grew with such strength that it developed into a 'way of seeing'. It has changed the ways in which we think about social theory, and we hope that it will do the same for others.

The book is intended to clarify and help overcome what seem to be some of the major sources of confusion within the social sciences at the present time. Initially it had a fairly specific objective: to attempt to relate theories of organisation to their wider sociological context. In the course of development, however, this endeavour widened in scope and evolved into an enterprise embracing many aspects of philosophy and social theory in general. As such it now stands as a discourse in social theory of relevance to many social science disciplines, of which those in the general area of organisation studies – industrial sociology, organisation theory, organisational psychology and industrial relations – are but special cases by which we illustrate our general themes.

Our proposition is that social theory can usefully be conceived in terms of four key paradigms based upon different sets of metatheoretical assumptions about the nature of social science and the nature of society. The four paradigms are founded upon mutually exclusive views of the social world. Each stands in its own right and generates its own distinctive analyses of social life. With regard to the study of organisations, for example, each paradigm generates theories and perspectives which are in fundamental opposition to those generated in other paradigms.

Such an analysis of social theory brings us face to face with the nature of the assumptions which underwrite different approaches to social science. It cuts through the surface detail which dresses many social theories to what is fundamental in determining the way in which we see the world which we are purporting to analyse. It stresses the crucial role played by the scientist's frame of reference in the generation of social theory and research.

The situation with regard to the field of organisation studies at the present time, as in other social science disciplines, is that a vast

proportion of theory and research is located within the bounds of just one of the four paradigms to be considered here. Indeed, the bulk of it is located within the context of a relatively narrow range of theoretical possibilities which define that one paradigm. It is no exaggeration, therefore, to suggest that the social-scientific enterprise in general is built upon an extremely narrow set of metatheoretical assumptions. This concentration of effort in a relatively narrow area defines what is usually regarded as the dominant orthodoxy within a subject. Because this orthodoxy is so dominant and strong, its adherents often take it for granted as right and self-evident. Rival perspectives within the same paradigm or outside its bounds appear as satellites defining alternative points of view. Their impact upon the orthodoxy, however, is rarely very significant. They are seldom strong enough to establish themselves as anything more than a somewhat deviant set of approaches. As a result the possibilities which they offer are rarely explored, let alone understood.

In order to understand alternative points of view it is important that a theorist be fully aware of the assumptions upon which his own perspective is based. Such an appreciation involves an intellectual journey which takes him outside the realm of his own familiar domain. It requires that he become aware of the boundaries which define his perspective. It requires that he journey into the unexplored. It requires that he become familiar with paradigms which are not his own. Only then can he look back and appreciate in full measure the precise nature of his starting point.

The work presented here is an attempt to take the student of organisations into realms which he has probably not explored before. It is a journey upon which we, the authors, unwittingly embarked as a result of certain nagging doubts and uncertainties about the utility and validity of much contemporary theory and research in our subject. We were concerned about the way in which studies of organisational activities had generated mountains of theory and research which seemed to have no obvious links outside narrow discipline areas. We were concerned about the essentially ephemeral nature of our subject. We were concerned about the academic sectarianism reflected at various times in open hostility, ostrich-like indifference and generally poor-quality dialogue and debate between essentially related schools of thought. In short, we felt that our subject area called for a close examination of the assumptions upon which it is based with a view to seeing it in a new, and hopefully refreshing, light. Our book in essence presents an account of our journey and a record of the

conclusions and insights which have emerged.

We began our enterprise by considering how we could distinguish between different approaches to the study of organisations. The view that 'all theories of organisation are based upon a philosophy of science and a theory of society' seemed to recur time and again in our conversations and we soon found it defining two major dimensions of analysis. Although organisation theorists are not always very explicit about the basic assumptions which inform their point of view, it is clear that they all take a stand on each of these issues. Whether they are aware of it or not, they bring to their subject of study a frame of reference which reflects a whole series of assumptions about the nature of the social world and the way in which it might be investigated.

Our attempt to explore these assumptions led us into the realm of social philosophy. We were confronted with problems of ontology and epistemology and other issues which rarely receive consideration within the field of organisation studies. As we investigated these issues we found that they underpinned the great philosophical debates between social theorists from rival intellectual traditions. We realised that the orthodoxy in our subject was based in essence upon just one of these traditions, and that the satellite perspectives which we had observed as surrounding the orthodoxy were, in fact, derived from quite a separate intellectual source. We realised that they were attempting to articulate points of view which derived from diametrically opposed assumptions about the basic nature of the social world; accordingly they subscribed to quite different assumptions about the very nature of the social-scientific enterprise itself.

In investigating assumptions with regard to the nature of society we were, at first, able to operate on firmer ground. The sociology of the 1960s had focused upon the 'order-conflict debate' – whether sociology emphasises the 'problem of order' or the 'problem of conflict and change'. By the late 1960s the debate had been pronounced dead, and these two views of society were seen merely as two aspects of the same problematic. In reviewing the literature relevant to this debate we became increasingly convinced that it had met a premature death. Whilst it was clear that academic sociologists had convinced themselves that the 'problem of conflict' could be subsumed under the 'problem of order', theorists outside this tradition, particularly those interested in Marxist theory, were actively engaged in the development of social theories which placed the problems of conflict and change at the forefront of their analysis. Although academic sociologists and

Marxist social theorists appeared content to work in isolation, ignoring the contradictory perspectives which they presented, it seemed that any adequate analysis of theories of society must take these rival perspectives into account.

Our journey into Marxist literature took us into yet another new realm as far as our initial interests were concerned. We were surprised to find striking parallels between intellectual developments within Marxist theory and academic sociology. We found that the assumptions about the nature of social science which had divided academic sociologists into different schools of thought also divided Marxist theorists. In that realm, too, the dominant theoretical framework was surrounded by satellite schools of thought offering rival explanations. Pursuing these traditions to their source, we found that they emerged from precisely the same bounds of social philosophy which had underwritten divergent elements within sociology itself. It became clear that the rival traditions emphasising 'order' as opposed to 'conflict' shared the same pedigree as far as their roots in social philosophy were concerned. Deriving from similar assumptions about the ontological and epistemological status of social science, they had been wedded to fundamentally different frames of reference with regard to the nature of society.

Given these cross linkages between rival intellectual traditions, it became clear to us that our two sets of assumptions could be counter-posed to produce an analytical scheme for studying social theories in general: the two sets of assumptions defined four basic paradigms reflecting quite separate views of social reality. On attempting to relate this scheme to the social science literature we found that we possessed an extremely powerful tool for negotiating our way through different subject areas, and one which made sense of a great deal of the confusion which characterises much contemporary debate within the social sciences. The scheme offered itself as a form of intellectual map upon which social theories could be located according to their source and tradition. Theories rarely if ever appear out of thin air; they usually have a well established history behind them. We found that our intellectual map allowed us to trace their evolution. Theories fell into place according to their origins. Where rival intellectual traditions had been fused, distinctive hybrid versions seemed to appear. What had first offered itself as a simple classificatory device for organising the literature now presented itself as an analytical tool. It pointed us towards new areas of investigation. It allowed us to appraise and evaluate theories against the backcloth of the intellectual tradition

which they sought to emulate. It allowed us to identify embryonic theories and anticipate potential lines of development. It allowed us to write this book.

In the following chapters we seek to present our analytical scheme and to use it to negotiate a way through the literature on social theory and organisational analysis. We have aimed to present it as clearly and directly as we can whilst avoiding the pitfalls of oversimplification. But the concepts of one paradigm cannot easily be interpreted in terms of those of another. To understand a new paradigm one has to explore it from the inside, in terms of its own distinctive problematic. Thus, whilst we have made every effort to present our account as plainly as possible as far as the use of the English language is concerned, we have necessarily had to draw upon concepts which may at times be unfamiliar.

The remaining chapters in Part I define the nature of our two key dimensions of analysis and the paradigms which arise within their bounds. In this analysis we polarise a number of issues and make much use of rough dichotomisations as a means of presenting our case. We do so not merely for the purposes of classification, but to forge a working tool. We advocate our scheme as a heuristic device rather than as a set of rigid definitions.

In Part II we put our analytical framework into operation. For each of our four paradigms we conduct an analysis of relevant social theory and then proceed to relate theories of organisation to this wider background. Each of the paradigms is treated in terms consistent with its own distinctive frame of reference. No attempt is made to criticise and evaluate from a perspective *outside* the paradigm. Such criticism is all too easy but self-defeating, since it is usually directed at the foundations of the paradigm itself. All four paradigms can successfully be demolished in these terms. What we seek to do is to develop the perspective characteristic of the paradigm and draw out some of its implications for social analysis. In so doing we have found that we are frequently able to strengthen the conceptualisations which each paradigm generates as far as the study of organisations is concerned. Our guiding rule has been to seek to offer something to each paradigm within the terms of its own problematic. The chapters in Part II, therefore, are essentially expository in nature. They seek to provide a detailed framework upon which future debate might fruitfully be based.

Part III presents a short conclusion which focuses upon some of the principal issues which emerge from our analysis.

PART I: IN SEARCH OF A FRAMEWORK

1. Assumptions about the Nature of Social Science

Central to our thesis is the idea that 'all theories of organisation are based upon a philosophy of science and a theory of society'. In this chapter we wish to address ourselves to the first aspect of this thesis and to examine some of the philosophical assumptions which underwrite different approaches to social science. We shall argue that it is convenient to conceptualise social science in terms of four sets of assumptions related to ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology.

All social scientists approach their subject via explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the social world and the way in which it may be investigated. First, there are assumptions of an *ontological* nature – assumptions which concern the very essence of the phenomena under investigation. Social scientists, for example, are faced with a basic ontological question: whether the 'reality' to be investigated is external to the individual – imposing itself on individual consciousness from without – or the product of individual consciousness; whether 'reality' is of an 'objective' nature, or the product of individual cognition; whether 'reality' is a given 'out there' in the world, or the product of one's mind.

Associated with this ontological issue, is a second set of assumptions of an *epistemological* nature. These are assumptions about the grounds of knowledge – about how one might begin to understand the world and communicate this as knowledge to fellow human beings. These assumptions entail ideas, for example, about what forms of knowledge can be obtained, and how one can sort out what is to be regarded as 'true' from what is to be regarded as 'false'. Indeed, this dichotomy of 'true' and 'false' itself presupposes a certain epistemological stance. It is predicated upon a view of the nature of knowledge itself: whether, for example, it is possible to identify and communicate the nature of knowledge as being hard, real and capable of being transmitted in tangible form, or whether 'knowledge' is of a softer, more subjective, spiritual or even transcendental kind, based on experience and insight of a

unique and essentially personal nature. The epistemological assumptions in these instances determine extreme positions on the issue of whether knowledge is something which can be acquired on the one hand, or is something which has to be personally experienced on the other.

Associated with the ontological and epistemological issues, but conceptually separate from them, is a third set of assumptions concerning *human nature* and, in particular, the relationship between human beings and their environment, All social science, clearly, must be predicated upon this type of assumption, since human life is essentially the subject and object of enquiry. Thus, we can identify perspectives in social science which entail a view of human beings responding in a mechanistic or even deterministic fashion to the situations encountered in their external world. This view tends to be one in which human beings and their experiences are regarded as products of the environment; one in which humans are conditioned by their external circumstances. This extreme perspective can be contrasted with one which attributes to human beings a much more creative role: with a perspective where 'free will' occupies the centre of the stage; where man is regarded as the creator of his environment, the controller as opposed to the controlled, the master rather than the marionette. In these two extreme views of the relationship between human beings and their environment we are identifying a great philosophical debate between the advocates of determinism on the one hand and voluntarism on the other. Whilst there are social theories which adhere to each of these extremes, as we shall see, the assumptions of many social scientists are pitched somewhere in the range between.

The three sets of assumptions outlined above have direct implications of a *methodological* nature. Each one has important consequences for the way in which one attempts to investigate and obtain 'knowledge' about the social world. Different ontologies, epistemologies and models of human nature are likely to incline social scientists towards different methodologies. The possible range of choice is indeed so large that what is regarded as science by the traditional 'natural scientist' covers but a small range of options. It is possible, for example, to identify methodologies employed in social science research which treat the social world like the natural world, as being hard, real and external to the individual, and others which view it as being of a much softer, personal and more subjective quality.

If one subscribes to a view of the former kind, which treats the

social world as if it were a hard, external, objective reality, then the scientific endeavour is likely to focus upon an analysis of relationships and regularities between the various elements which it comprises. The concern, therefore, is with the identification and definition of these elements and with the discovery of ways in which these relationships can be expressed. The methodological issues of importance are thus the concepts themselves, their measurement and the identification of underlying themes. This perspective expresses itself most forcefully in a search for universal laws which explain and govern the reality which is being observed.

If one subscribes to the alternative view of social reality, which stresses the importance of the subjective experience of individuals in the creation of the social world, then the search for understanding focuses upon different issues and approaches them in different ways. The principal concern is with an understanding of the way in which the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which he or she finds himself. The emphasis in extreme cases tends to be placed upon the explanation and understanding of what is unique and particular to the individual rather than of what is general and universal. This approach questions whether there exists an external reality worthy of study. In methodological terms it is an approach which emphasises the relativistic nature of the social world to such an extent that it may be perceived as 'anti-scientific' by reference to the ground rules commonly applied in the natural sciences.

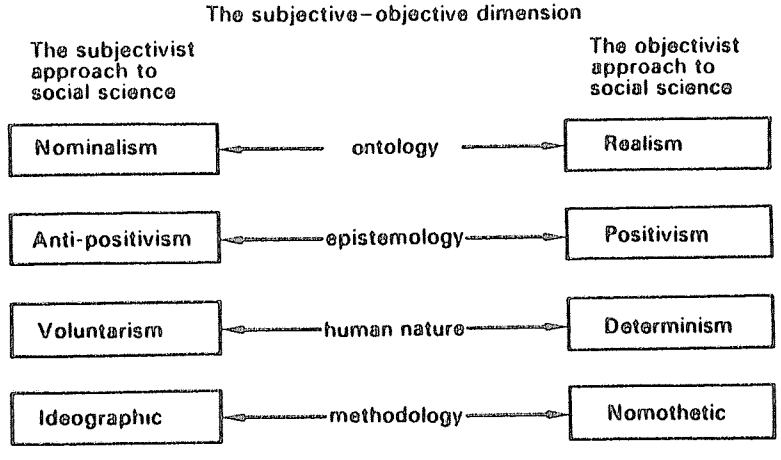


Figure 1.1 A scheme for analysing assumptions about the nature of social science

In this brief sketch of various ontological, epistemological, human and methodological standpoints which characterise approaches to social sciences, we have sought to illustrate two broad and somewhat polarised perspectives. Figure 1.1 seeks to depict these in a more rigorous fashion in terms of what we shall describe as the subjective—objective dimension. It identifies the four sets of assumptions relevant to our understanding of social science, characterising each by the descriptive labels under which they have been debated in the literature on social philosophy. In the following section of this chapter we will review each of the four debates in necessarily brief but more systematic terms.

The Strands of Debate

Nominalism–realism: the ontological debate[1]

These terms have been the subject of much discussion in the literature and there are great areas of controversy surrounding them. The nominalist position revolves around the assumption that the social world external to individual cognition is made up of nothing more than names, concepts and labels which are used to structure reality. The nominalist does not admit to there being any 'real' structure to the world which these concepts are used to describe. The 'names' used are regarded as artificial creations whose utility is based upon their convenience as tools for describing, making sense of and negotiating the external world. Nominalism is often equated with conventionalism, and we will make no distinction between them.[2]

Realism, on the other hand, postulates that the social world external to individual cognition is a real world made up of hard, tangible and relatively immutable structures. Whether or not we label and perceive these structures, the realists maintain, they still exist as empirical entities. We may not even be aware of the existence of certain crucial structures and therefore have no 'names' or concepts to articulate them. For the realist, the social world exists independently of an individual's appreciation of it. The individual is seen as being born into and living within a social world which has a reality of its own. It is not something which the individual creates—it exists 'out there'; ontologically it is prior to the existence and consciousness of any single human being. For the realist, the social world has an existence which is as hard and concrete as the natural world.[3]

Anti-positivism–positivism: the epistemological debate[4]

It has been maintained that 'the word "positivist" like the word "bourgeois" has become more of a derogatory epithet than a useful descriptive concept'.[5] We intend to use it here in the latter sense, as a descriptive concept which can be used to characterise a particular type of epistemology. Most of the descriptions of positivism in current usage refer to one or more of the ontological, epistemological and methodological dimensions of our scheme for analysing assumptions with regard to social science. It is also sometimes mistakenly equated with empiricism. Such conflations cloud basic issues and contribute to the use of the term in a derogatory sense.

We use 'positivist' here to characterise epistemologies which seek to explain and predict what happens in the social world by searching for regularities and causal relationships between its constituent elements. Positivist epistemology is in essence based upon the traditional approaches which dominate the natural sciences. Positivists may differ in terms of detailed approach. Some would claim, for example, that hypothesised regularities can be verified by an adequate experimental research programme. Others would maintain that hypotheses can only be falsified and never demonstrated to be 'true'.[6] However, both 'verificationists' and 'falsificationists' would accept that the growth of knowledge is essentially a cumulative process in which new insights are added to the existing stock of knowledge and false hypotheses eliminated.

The epistemology of anti-positivism may take various forms but is firmly set against the utility of a search for laws or underlying regularities in the world of social affairs. For the anti-positivist, the social world is essentially relativistic and can only be understood from the point of view of the individuals who are directly involved in the activities which are to be studied. Anti-positivists reject the standpoint of the 'observer', which characterises positivist epistemology, as a valid vantage point for understanding human activities. They maintain that one can only 'understand' by occupying the frame of reference of the participant in action. One has to understand from the inside rather than the outside. From this point of view social science is seen as being essentially a subjective rather than an objective enterprise. Anti-positivists tend to reject the notion that science can generate objective knowledge of any kind.[7]

Voluntarism–determinism: the 'human nature' debate

This debate revolves around the issue of what model of man is reflected in any given social-scientific theory. At one extreme we can identify a determinist view which regards man and his activities as being completely determined by the situation or 'environment' in which he is located. At another extreme we can identify the voluntarist view that man is completely autonomous and free-willed. Insofar as social science theories are concerned to understand human activities, they must incline implicitly or explicitly to one or other of these points of view, or adopt an intermediate standpoint which allows for the influence of both situational and voluntary factors in accounting for the activities of human beings. Such assumptions are essential elements in social-scientific theories, since they define in broad terms the nature of the relationships between man and the society in which he lives.[8]

Ideographic–nomothetic theory: the methodological debate

The ideographic approach to social science is based on the view that one can only understand the social world by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the subject under investigation. It thus places considerable stress upon getting close to one's subject and exploring its detailed background and life history. The ideographic approach emphasises the analysis of the subjective accounts which one generates by 'getting inside' situations and involving oneself in the everyday flow of life – the detailed analysis of the insights generated by such encounters with one's subject and the insights revealed in impressionistic accounts found in diaries, biographies and journalistic records. The ideographic method stresses the importance of letting one's subject unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation.[9]

The nomothetic approach to social science lays emphasis on the importance of basing research upon systematic protocol and technique. It is epitomised in the approach and methods employed in the natural sciences, which focus upon the process of testing hypotheses in accordance with the canons of scientific rigour. It is preoccupied with the construction of scientific tests and the use of quantitative techniques for the analysis of data. Surveys, questionnaires, personality tests and standardised research instruments of all kinds are prominent among the tools which comprise nomothetic methodology.[10]

Analysing Assumptions about the Nature of Social Science

These four sets of assumptions with regard to the nature of social science provide an extremely powerful tool for the analysis of social theory. In much of the literature there is a tendency to conflate the issues which are involved. We wish to argue here that considerable advantages accrue from treating these four strands of social-scientific debate as analytically distinct. While in practice there is often a strong relationship between the positions adopted on each of the four strands, assumptions about each can in fact vary quite considerably. It is worth examining this point in more detail.

The extreme positions on each of the four strands are reflected in the two major intellectual traditions which have dominated social science over the last two hundred years. The first of these is usually described as 'sociological positivism'. In essence this reflects the attempt to apply models and methods derived from the natural sciences to the study of human affairs. It treats the social world as if it were the natural world, adopting a 'realist' approach to ontology. This is backed up by a 'positivist' epistemology, relatively 'deterministic' views of human nature and the use of 'nomothetic' methodologies. The second intellectual tradition, that of 'German idealism', stands in complete opposition to this. In essence it is based upon the premise that the ultimate reality of the universe lies in 'spirit' or 'idea' rather than in the data of sense perception. It is essentially 'nominalist' in its approach to social reality. In contrast to the natural sciences, it stresses the essentially subjective nature of human affairs, denying the utility and relevance of the models and methods of natural science to studies in this realm. It is 'anti-positivist' in epistemology, 'voluntarist' with regard to human nature and it favours ideographic methods as a foundation for social analysis. Sociological positivism and German idealism thus define the objective and subjective extremes of our model.

Many sociologists and organisation theorists have been brought up within the tradition of sociological positivism, without

exposure to the basic tenets of German idealism. Social science for them is seen as consonant with the configuration of assumptions which characterise the objective extreme of our model. However, over the last seventy years or so there has been an increasing interaction between these two traditions, particularly at a socio-philosophical level. As a result intermediate points of view have emerged, each with its own distinctive configuration of assumptions about the nature of social science. They have all spawned theories, ideas and approaches characteristic of their intermediate position. As we shall argue in later chapters, developments in phenomenology, ethnomethodology and the action frame of reference are to be understood in these terms. These perspectives, whilst offering their own special brand of insight, have also often been used as launching pads for attacks on sociological positivism and have generated a considerable amount of debate between rival schools of thought. The nature of this debate can only be fully understood by grasping and appreciating the different assumptions which underwrite the competing points of view.

It is our contention that the analytical scheme offered here enables one to do precisely this. It is offered not as a mere classificatory device, but as an important tool for negotiating social theory. It draws attention to key assumptions. It allows one to focus on precise issues which differentiate socio-scientific approaches. It draws attention to the degree of congruency between the four sets of assumptions about social science which characterise any given theorist's point of view. We offer it here as the first principal dimension of our theoretical scheme for analysing theory in general and organisational theory in particular. For the sake of convenience we shall normally refer to it as the 'subjective—objective' dimension, two descriptive labels which perhaps capture the points of commonality between the four analytical strands.

Notes and References

1. For a further discussion of the nominalism—realism debate, see Kolakowski (1972), pp. 15–16.
2. Kolakowski (1972), pp. 158–9. In its most extreme form nominalism does not recognise the existence of any world outside the realm of individual consciousness. This is the solipsist position, which we discuss in more detail in Chapter 6.

3. For a comprehensive review of 'realism', see Keat and Urry (1975), pp. 27–45. They make much of the distinction between 'positivism' and 'realism' but, as they admit, these terms are used in a somewhat unconventional way.
4. For a further discussion of the positivism—anti-positivism debate, see, for example, Giddens (1974) and Walsh (1972).
5. Giddens (1974), p. 1.
6. See, for example, Popper (1963).
7. For a good illustration of an anti-positivist view of science, see Douglas (1970b), pp. 3–44.
8. The human nature debate in its widest sense involves many other issues which we have not referred to here. The precise model of man to be employed in any analytical scheme, however, is underwritten by assumptions which reflect the voluntarism-determinism issue in one way or another. We have isolated this element of the debate here as a way of treating at its most basic level a necessary assumption of all social-scientific theories which purport to account for human activities. Detailed propositions with regard to the precise explanation of human activities elaborate in one way or another this basic theme.
9. For an excellent discussion of the nature of the ideographic approach to social science, see Blumer (1969), ch. 1.
10. It is important to emphasise here that both nomothetic and ideographic methodologies can be employed in a deductive and inductive sense. Whilst the inductive—deductive debate in science is a subject of considerable interest and importance, we do not see it as being central to the four dimensions suggested here as a means of distinguishing between the *nature* of social science theories. That notwithstanding, it remains an important methodological issue, of relevance to both sociology and organisational analysis, *within* the context of the assumptions explored here.

2. Assumptions about the Nature of Society

All approaches to the study of society are located in a frame of reference of one kind or another. Different theories tend to reflect different perspectives, issues and problems worthy of study, and are generally based upon a whole set of assumptions which reflect a particular view of the nature of the subject under investigation. The last twenty years or so have witnessed a number of attempts on the part of sociologists to delineate the differences which separate various schools of thought and the meta-sociological assumptions which they reflect.

The Order—Conflict Debate

Dahrendorf (1959) and Lockwood (1956), for example, have sought to distinguish between those approaches to sociology which concentrated upon explaining the nature of social order and equilibrium on the one hand, and those which were more concerned with problems of change, conflict and coercion in social structures on the other. This distinction has received a great deal of attention and has come to be known as the 'order—conflict debate'. The 'order theorists' have greatly outnumbered the 'conflict theorists', and as Dawe has observed, 'the thesis that sociology is centrally concerned with the problem of social order has become one of the discipline's few orthodoxies. It is common as a basic premise to many accounts of sociological theory which otherwise differ considerably in purpose and perspective' (Dawe, 1970, p. 207).[1]

Many sociologists now regard this debate as dead or as having been a somewhat spurious non-debate in the first place (Cohen, 1968; Silverman, 1970; van den Berghe, 1969). Influenced by the work of writers such as Coser (1956), who pointed to the functional aspects of social conflict, sociologists have been able to incorporate conflict as a variable within the bounds of theories which are

primarily geared towards an explanation of social order. The approach advocated by Cohen, for example, clearly illustrates this. He takes his point of departure from the work of Dahrendorf and elaborates some of the central ideas in the order—conflict debate to present two models of society, which are characterised in terms of competing sets of assumptions which attribute to social systems the characteristics of *commitment, cohesion, solidarity, consensus, reciprocity, co-operation, integration, stability* and *persistence* on the one hand, and the characteristics of *coercion, division, hostility, dissensus, conflict, malintegration* and *change* on the other (Cohen, 1968, pp. 166-7).

Cohen's central criticism is that Dahrendorf is mistaken in treating the order and conflict models as being entirely separate. He in effect suggests that it is possible for theories to involve elements of both models and that one need not necessarily incline to one or the other. From this point of view, the order and conflict views of society are but two sides of the same coin; they are not mutually exclusive and thus do not need to be reconciled. The force of this sort of argument has been very powerful in diverting attention away from the order—conflict debate. In the wake of the so-called counter-culture movement of the late 1960s and the failure of the 1968 revolution in France, orthodox sociologists have become much more interested in and concerned with the problems of the 'individual' as opposed to those of the 'structure' of society in general. The influence of 'subjectivist' movements such as phenomenology, ethnomethodology and action theory, which we referred to in passing in the previous chapter, have tended to become much more attractive and more worthy of attention. As a result, interest in continuing the conflict—order debate has subsided under the influence of issues relating to the philosophy and methods of social science.

Our contention here is that if one reviews the intellectual source and foundations of the order—conflict debate, one is forced to conclude that it has met a premature death. Dahrendorf and Lockwood sought to revitalise the work of Marx through their writings and to restore it to a central place in sociological theory. For the most part Marx had been largely ignored by leading sociologists, the influence of theorists such as Durkheim, Weber and Pareto having been paramount. Interestingly enough, these latter three sociologists are all very much concerned with the problem of social order; it is Marx who is preoccupied with the role of conflict as the driving force behind social change. Stated in this way, therefore, the order—conflict debate is underwritten by a

difference between the perspectives and concerns of leading social theorists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Modern sociology has done little more than articulate and develop the basic themes initiated by these pioneers of social analysis. To state that the order—conflict debate is 'dead' or a 'non-debate' is thus to underplay, if not ignore, substantial differences between the work of Marx and, for example, Durkheim, Weber and Pareto. Anyone familiar with the work of these theorists and aware of the deep division which exists between Marxism and sociology is forced to admit that there are fundamental differences, which are far from being reconciled.[2] In this chapter therefore, we wish to re-evaluate the order—conflict issue with a view to identifying a key dimension for analysing the assumptions about the nature of society reflected in different social theories. In order to do so, let us return to the work of Dahrendorf, who seeks to set out the opposing issues in the following terms:

> The integration theory of society, as displayed by the work of Parsons and other structural-functionalists, is founded on a number of assumptions of the following type:
>
> (1) Every society is a relatively persistent, stable structure of elements.
> (2) Every society is a well integrated structure of elements.
> (3) Every element in a society has a function, i.e., renders a contribution to its maintenance as a system.
> (4) Every functioning social structure is based on a consensus of values among its members . . . .
>
> . . . What I have called the coercion theory of society can also be reduced to a small number of basic tenets, although here again these assumptions oversimplify and overstate the case:
>
> (1) Every society is at every point subject to processes of change; social change is ubiquitous.
> (2) Every society displays at every point dissensus and conflict; social conflict is ubiquitous.
> (3) Every element in a society renders a contribution to its disintegration and change.
> (4) Every society is based on the coercion of some of its members by others. (Dahrendorf, 1959, pp. 160–2)

The opposing adjectives which Dahrendorf's schema suggests for distinguishing approaches to the study of society can be conveniently brought together in the form of a table, as follows:

Table 2.1

Two theories of society: 'order' and 'conflict'

The 'order' or 'integrationist' view of society emphasises:	*The 'conflict' or 'coercion' view of society emphasises:*
Stability	Change
Integration	Conflict
Functional co-ordination	Disintegration
Consensus	Coercion

As Dahrendorf admits, this conceptualisation is something of an oversimplification, and whilst providing a very useful tool for coming to grips with the differences between the two standpoints, it is open to the possibility of misinterpretation, in that the different adjectives mean different things to different people. Nowhere is this more evident than in the way in which the notion of *conflict* has been treated in the sociological literature. Since Coser's demonstration of the functions of social conflict, for example, the role of conflict as an integrating mechanism has received a great deal of attention. In effect, the whole notion of 'conflict' has often been incorporated within the notion of integration. Dahrendorf's integration/conflict dimension has been conveniently telescoped so that it is brought within the bounds of sociology's traditional concern for the explanation of order. The fallacy of this position becomes clear if one considers certain extreme forms of conflict, such as class conflict, revolution and war, which can only be incorporated in the integrationist model by the wildest stretch of one's imagination. Examples such as these suggest that it is misleading to equate this type of macrostructural conflict with the functional conflict identified by Coser. There is an important question of degree involved here, which emphasises the dangers of the dichotomisation of integration and conflict; realistically the distinction between the two is much more of a continuum than the majority of writers have recognised.

Another strand of the Dahrendorf scheme which can be regarded as somewhat problematic lies in the distinction between *consensus* and *coercion*. At first sight the distinction appears obvious and clear-cut, focusing upon shared values on the one hand and the imposition of some sort of force on the other. On closer inspection there is a certain ambiguity. Where do the shared values come from? Are they acquired autonomously or imposed on some members of society by others? This question identifies the

possibility that consensus may be the product of the use of some form of coercive force. For example, as C. Wright Mills has pointed out, 'What Parsons and other grand theorists call "value orientations" and "normative structure" has mainly to do with master symbols of legitimation' (1959, p. 46).

A normative structure here – what Dahrendorf would view as consensus – is treated as a system legitimising the power structure. From Mills's point of view, it reflects the fact of domination. In other words, shared values may be regarded not so much as an index of the degree of integration which characterises a society as one which reflects the success of the forces of domination in a society prone to disintegration. From one point of view, extant shared ideas, values and norms are something to be preserved; from another, they represent a mode of domination from which man needs to be released. The consensus/coercion dimension can thus be seen as focusing upon the issue of social control. Consensus – however it may arise – is identified in Dahrendorf's scheme as something independent of coercion. This we believe to be a mistaken view since, as suggested above, it ignores the possibility of a form of coercion which arises through the control of value systems.

In distinguishing between *stability* and *change* as respective features of the order and conflict models Dahrendorf is again open to misinterpretation, even though he explicitly states that he does not intend to imply that the theory of order assumes that societies are static. His concern is to show how functional theories are essentially concerned with those processes which serve to maintain the patterns of the system as a whole. In other words, functional theories are regarded as static in the sense that they are concerned with explaining the *status quo*. In this respect conflict theories are clearly of a different nature; they are committed to, and seek to explain, the process and nature of deep-seated structural change in society as opposed to change of a more superficial and ephemeral kind. The fact that all functional theories recognise change, and that change is an obvious empirical reality in everyday life, has led Dahrendorf's categorisation in relation to stability and change to lose its potential radical force and influence. It can be argued that different labels are required to identify Dahrendorf's two paramount concerns: first, that the order view of society is primarily *status quo* orientated; second, that it deals with change of a fundamentally different nature from that with which conflict theorists are concerned.[3]

Dahrendorf's notions of *functional co-ordination* and *disintegration* can be seen as constituting one of the most powerful strands of thought which distinguish the order and conflict perspectives. Here again, however, there is room for misinterpretation. The concept of integration in Dahrendorf's work derives from the functionalists' concern with the contribution which constituent elements of a system make to the whole. In many respects this is an oversimplification. Merton (1948) introduced the idea of manifest and latent functions, some of which may be dysfunctional for the integration of society.[4] Again, Gouldner (1959), writing shortly after the publication of the German edition of Dahrendorf's work, suggests that various parts of a system may have a high degree of autonomy and may contribute very little by way of integration to the system as a whole. The term 'functional co-ordination' is thus something of an oversimplification and, given the existence of the points of view expressed above within the functionalist camp itself, it is not surprising that the concept of 'disintegration' should be seen as relevant and capable of being used from a functional standpoint. 'Disintegration' can be very easily viewed as an integrationist concept and, as with other aspects of Dahrendorf's scheme, this dimension has often been telescoped and brought within the bounds of the theories of order. For this reason it may well have been clearer if the position of conflict theory on this dimension had been presented in more radical and distinctive terms. There is much in Marxian theory, for example, which refers to the notion of 'contradiction' and the basic incompatibility between different elements of social structure. Contradiction implies heterogeneity, imbalance and essentially antagonistic and divergent social forces. It thus stands at the opposite pole to the concept of 'functional co-ordination', which must presuppose a basic compatibility between the elements of any given system. To argue that the concept of contradiction can be embraced within functional analysis requires either an act of faith or at least a considerable leap of imagination.

Dahrendorf's work has clearly served a very useful purpose in identifying a number of important strands of thought distinguishing theorists of order from theorists of conflict. However, as will be apparent from the above discussion, in many respects the distinctions which have been drawn between the two meta-theories do not go far enough. In particular, the insights of some twenty years of debate suggest that the characterisation of the conflict perspective has not been sufficiently radical to avoid confusion with the 'integrationist' perspective. This has allowed theorists of order to meet the challenge which Dahrendorf's scheme presents

to their frame of reference within the context of their order-orientated mode of thought. In order to illustrate this point, let us return to the work of Cohen (1968) referred to earlier.

In advocating his viewpoint Cohen appears to be misinterpreting the distinction between the two models. His interpretation of concepts telescopes the different variables into a form in which they can be seen as consistent with each other. In effect his whole analysis reflects an attempt to incorporate the conflict model within the bounds of the contemporary theory of order. He thus loses the radical essence of the conflict perspective and is able to conclude that the two models are not mutually exclusive and do not need to be reconciled. He argues that the two models are not genuine alternatives and in effect suggests that each is no more than the reciprocal of the other. He is therefore able to leave Dahrendorf's analysis with the central concern of his book – the problem of order – largely intact. The incorporation of conflict into the bounds of the model of order de-emphasises its importance.[5]

In line with the analysis which we presented earlier, we argue that the attempt to reduce the two models to a common base ignores the fundamental differences which exist between them. A conflict theory based on deep-seated structural conflict and concerned with radical transformations of society is not consistent with a functionalist perspective. The differences between them, therefore, are important and worthy of distinction in any attempt to analyse social theory. With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to see that many of the misinterpretations which have arisen have done so because the models in Dahrendorf's analysis were not sufficiently differentiated. We wish to propose, therefore, that certain modifications be made in order to articulate the differences in a more explicit and radical form. Since much of the confusion has arisen because of the ambiguity of the descriptions associated with the two models we wish to suggest the use of a somewhat different terminology.

'Regulation' and 'Radical Change'

Our analysis has shown that the order—conflict distinction is in many senses the most problematic. We suggest, therefore, that it should be replaced as a central theme by the notions of 'regulation' and 'radical change'.

We introduce the term '*sociology of regulation*' to refer to the writings of theorists who are primarily concerned to provide explanations of society in terms which emphasise its underlying unity and cohesiveness. It is a sociology which is essentially concerned with the need for regulation in human affairs; the basic questions which it asks tend to focus upon the need to understand why society is maintained as an entity. It attempts to explain why society tends to hold together rather than fall apart. It is interested in understanding the social forces which prevent the Hobbesian vision of 'war of all against all' becoming a reality. The work of Durkheim with its emphasis upon the nature of social cohesion and solidarity, for example, provides a clear and comprehensive illustration of a concern for the sociology of regulation.

The '*sociology of radical change*' stands in stark contrast to the 'sociology of regulation', in that its basic concern is to find explanations for the radical change, deep-seated structural conflict, modes of domination and structural contradiction which its theorists see as characterising modern society. It is a sociology which is essentially concerned with man's emancipation from the structures which limit and stunt his potential for development. The basic questions which it asks focus upon the deprivation of man, both material and psychic. It is often visionary and Utopian, in that it looks towards potentiality as much as actuality; it is concerned with what is possible rather than with what is; with alternatives rather than with acceptance of the *status quo*. In these respects it is as widely separate and distant from the sociology of regulation as the sociology of Marx is separated and distant from the sociology of Durkheim.

The distinction between these two sociologies can perhaps be best illustrated in schematic form; extreme points of view are counter-posed in order to highlight the essential differences between them. Table 2.2 summarises the situation.

We offer this regulation—radical change distinction as the second principal dimension of our scheme for analysing social theories. Along with the subjective—objective dimension developed in the previous chapter, we present it as a powerful means for identifying and analysing the assumptions which underlie social theories in general.

The notions of 'regulation' and 'radical change' have thus far been presented in a very rough and extreme form. The two models illustrated in Table 2.2 should be regarded as ideal-typical formulations. The seven elements which we have identified lend themselves to a much more rigorous and systematic treatment in

which their overall form and nature is spelt out in detail. We delay this task until later chapters. Here, we wish to address ourselves to the broad relationships which exist between the sociologies of regulation and radical change. We maintain that they present fundamentally different views and interpretations of the nature of society. They reflect fundamentally different frames of reference. They present themselves, therefore, as *alternative* models for the analysis of social processes.

To present the models in this way is to invite criticism along the lines of that levelled at Dahrendorf's work. For example, it could be suggested that the two models are the reciprocals of each other – no more than two sides of the same coin – and that relationships

Table 2.2

The regulation—radical change dimension

The sociology of REGULATION is concerned with:	*The sociology of RADICAL CHANGE is concerned with:*
(a) The status quo	(a) Radical change
(b) Social order	(b) Structural conflict
(c) Consensus*	(c) Modes of domination
(d) Social integration and cohesion	(d) Contradiction
(e) Solidarity	(e) Emancipation
(f) Need satisfaction†	(f) Deprivation
(g) Actuality	(g) Potentiality

Notes

* By 'consensus' we mean voluntary and 'spontaneous' agreement of opinion.

† The term 'need satisfaction' is used to refer to the focus upon satisfaction of individual or system 'needs'. The sociology of regulation tends to presume that various social characteristics can be explained in relation to these needs. It presumes that it is possible to identify and satisfy human needs within the context of existing social systems, and that society reflects these needs. The concept of 'deprivation', on the other hand, is rooted in the notion that the social 'system' prevents human fulfilment; indeed that 'deprivation' is created as the result of the *status quo*. The social 'system' is not seen as satisfying needs but as eroding the possibilities for human fulfilment. It is rooted in the notion that society has resulted in deprivation rather than in gain.

between the sub-elements of each model need not be congruent, that is, an analysis may pay attention to elements of both.

The answer to both criticisms follows our defence of Dahrendorf's work. To conflate the two models and treat them as variations on a single theme is to ignore or at least to underplay the fundamental differences which exist between them. Whilst it may be possible to use each model in a diluted form and thus obtain two analyses of the middle ground which approximate each other, they must remain essentially separate, since they are based upon opposing assumptions. Thus, as we have illustrated, to discuss the 'functions' of social conflict is to commit oneself to the sociology of regulation as opposed to that of radical change. However close one's position might be to the middle ground, it would seem that one must always be committed to one side more than another. The fundamental distinctions between the sociologies of regulation and radical change will become clear from our analysis of their intellectual development and constituent schools of thought in later chapters. We conceptualise these two broad sociological perspectives in the form of a polarised dimension, recognising that while variations within the context of each are possible, the perspectives are necessarily separate and distinct from each other.

Notes and References

1. Among the numerous theorists primarily concerned with the problem of order, Dawe cites Parsons (1949), Nisbet (1967), Bramson (1961), Cohen (1968), and Aron (1968).
2. For a discussion of the Marxism versus social science debate, see Shaw (1975). The division between Marxist theorists and orthodox sociologists is now so deep that they either ignore each other completely, or indulge in an exchange of abuse and accusation regarding the political conservatism or subversiveness commonly associated with their respective points of view. Debate about the intellectual strengths and weaknesses of their opposing standpoints is conspicuous by its absence.
3. Later in this chapter we suggest that the descriptions of 'concern with the *status quo*' and 'concern for *radical change*' provide more accurate views of the issues involved here.

4. Dahrendorf acknowledges Merton's distinction between latent and manifest functions but does not pursue the consequence of 'dysfunctions' for the concept of integration (Dahrendorf, 1959, pp. 173–9).
5. Other 'order' theorists who have addressed themselves to Dahrendorf's model tend to follow a similar path in the attempt to embrace conflict theory within their perspective. See, for example, van den Berghe (1969).

3. Two Dimensions: Four Paradigms

In the previous two chapters we have focused upon some of the key assumptions which characterise different approaches to social theory. We have argued that it is possible to analyse these approaches in terms of two key dimensions of analysis, each of which subsumes a series of related themes. It has been suggested that assumptions about the nature of science can be thought of in terms of what we call the subjective—objective dimension, and assumptions about the nature of society in terms of a regulation—radical change dimension. In this chapter we wish to discuss the relationships between the two dimensions and to develop a coherent scheme for the analysis of social theory.

We have already noted how sociological debate since the late 1960s has tended to ignore the distinctions between the two dimensions – in particular, how there has been a tendency to focus upon issues concerned with the subjective—objective dimension and to ignore those concerned with the regulation—radical change dimension. Interestingly enough, this focus of attention has characterised sociological thought associated with both regulation and radical change. The subjective—objective debate has been conducted independently within both sociological camps.

Within the sociology of regulation it has assumed the form of a debate between interpretive sociology and functionalism. In the wake of Berger and Luckmann's treatise on the sociology of knowledge (1966), Garfinkel's work on ethnomethodology (1967) and a general resurgence of interest in phenomenology, the questionable status of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the functionalist perspective have become increasingly exposed. The debate has often led to a polarisation between the two schools of thought.

Similarly, within the context of the sociology of radical change there has been a division between theorists subscribing to 'subjective' and 'objective' views of society. The debate in many respects takes its lead from the publication in France in 1966 and Britain in

1969 of Louis Althusser's work *For Marx*. This presented the notion of an 'epistemological break' in Marx's work and emphasised the polarisation of Marxist theorists into two camps: those emphasising the 'subjective' aspects of Marxism (Lukács and the Frankfurt School, for example) and those advocating more 'objective' approaches, such as that associated with Althusserian structuralism.

Within the context of the sociologies both of regulation and radical change, therefore, the middle to late 1960s witnessed a distinct switch in the focus of attention. The debate *between* these two sociologies which had characterised the early 1960s disappeared and was replaced by an introverted dialogue *within* the context of each of the separate schools of thought. Instead of 'speaking' to each other they turned inwards and addressed their remarks to themselves. The concern to sort out their position with regard to what we call the subjective—objective dimension, a complicated process in view of all the interrelated strands, led to a neglect of the regulation—radical change dimension.

As a consequence of these developments, recent debate has often been confused. Sociological thought has tended to be characterised by a narrow sectarianism, from which an overall perspective and grasp of basic issues are conspicuously absent. The time is ripe for consideration of the way ahead, and we submit that the two key dimensions of analysis which we have identified define critical parameters within which this can take place. We present them as

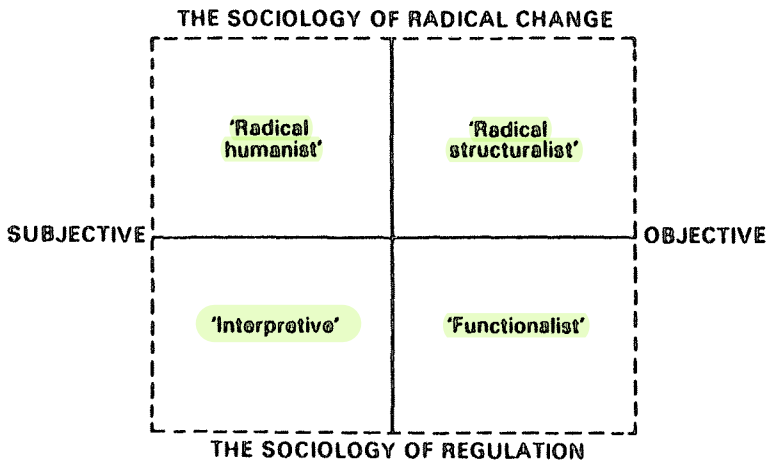


Figure 3.1 Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory

two independent dimensions which resurrect the sociological issues of the early 1960s and place them alongside those of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Taken together, they define four distinct sociological paradigms which can be utilised for the analysis of a wide range of social theories. The relationship between these paradigms, which we label 'radical humanist', 'radical structuralist', 'interpretive' and 'functionalist', is illustrated in Figure 3.1.

It will be clear from the diagram that each of the paradigms shares a common set of features with its neighbours on the horizontal and vertical axes in terms of one of the two dimensions but is differentiated on the other dimension. For this reason they should be viewed as contiguous but separate – contiguous because of the shared characteristics, but separate because the differentiation is, as we shall demonstrate later, of sufficient importance to warrant treatment of the paradigms as four distinct entities. The four paradigms define fundamentally different perspectives for the analysis of social phenomena. They approach this endeavour from contrasting standpoints and generate quite different concepts and analytical tools.

The Nature and Uses of the Four Paradigms

Before going on to discuss the substantive nature of each of the paradigms, it will be as well to pay some attention to the way in which we intend the notion of 'paradigm' to be used.[1] We regard our four paradigms as being defined by very basic meta-theoretical assumptions which underwrite the frame of reference, mode of theorising and *modus operandi* of the social theorists who operate within them. It is a term which is intended to emphasise the commonality of perspective which binds the work of a group of theorists together in such a way that they can be usefully regarded as approaching social theory within the bounds of the same problematic.

This definition does not imply complete unity of thought. It allows for the fact that within the context of any given paradigm there will be much debate between theorists who adopt different standpoints. The paradigm does, however, have an underlying unity in terms of its basic and often 'taken for granted' assumptions, which separate a group of theorists in a very fundamental way from theorists located in other paradigms. The 'unity' of the paradigm thus derives from reference to alternative views of real-

ity which lie outside its boundaries and which may not necessarily even be recognised as existing.

In identifying four paradigms in social theory we are in essence suggesting that it is meaningful to examine work in the subject area in terms of four sets of basic assumptions. Each set identifies a quite separate social-scientific reality. To be located in a particular paradigm is to view the world in a particular way. The four paradigms thus define four views of the social world based upon different meta-theoretical assumptions with regard to the nature of science and of society.

It is our contention that all social theorists can be located within the context of these four paradigms according to the meta-theoretical assumptions reflected in their work. The four paradigms taken together provide a map for negotiating the subject area, which offers a convenient means of identifying the basic similarities and differences between the work of various theorists and, in particular, the underlying frame of reference which they adopt. It also provides a convenient way of locating one's own personal frame of reference with regard to social theory, and thus a means of understanding why certain theories and perspectives may have more personal appeal than others. Like any other map, it provides a tool for establishing where you are, where you have been and where it is possible to go in the future. It provides a tool for mapping intellectual journeys in social theory – one's own and those of the theorists who have contributed to the subject area.

In this work we intend to make much use of the map-like qualities of the four paradigms. Each defines a range of intellectual territory. Given the overall meta-theoretical assumptions which distinguish one paradigm from another, there is room for much variation within them. Within the context of the 'functionalist' paradigm, for example, certain theorists adopt more extreme positions in terms of one or both of the two dimensions than others. Such differences often account for the internal debate which goes on between theorists engaged in the activities of 'normal science' within the context of the same paradigm.[2] The remaining chapters of this work examine each of the four paradigms in some detail and attempt to locate their principal theorists in these terms.

Our research suggests that whilst the activity within the context of each paradigm is often considerable, inter-paradigmatic 'journeys' are much rarer. This is in keeping with Kuhn's (1970) notion of 'revolutionary science'. For a theorist to switch paradigms calls for a change in meta-theoretical assumptions, something which, although manifestly possible, is not often achieved in

practice. As Keat and Urry put it, 'For individual scientists, the change of allegiance from one paradigm to another is often a "conversion experience", akin to *Gestalt*-switches or changes of religious faith' (1975, p. 55). When a theorist does shift his position in this way, it stands out very clearly as a major break with his intellectual tradition and is heralded as being so in the literature, in that the theorist is usually welcomed by those whom he has joined and often disowned by his former 'paradigm colleagues'. Thus we witness what is known as the 'epistemological break' between the work of the young Marx and the mature Marx – what we would identify as a shift from the radical humanist paradigm to the radical structuralist paradigm. At the level of organisational analysis, a distinct paradigm shift can be detected in the work of Silverman – a shift from the functionalist paradigm to the interpretive paradigm. We will analyse such intellectual journeys in more detail in later chapters.

Before we progress to a review of the four paradigms, one point is worthy of further emphasis. This relates to the fact that the four paradigms are mutually exclusive. They offer alternative views of social reality, and to understand the nature of all four is to understand four different views of society. They offer different ways of seeing. A synthesis is not possible, since in their pure forms they are contradictory, being based on at least one set of opposing meta-theoretical assumptions. They are alternatives, in the sense that one *can* operate in different paradigms sequentially over time, but mutually exclusive, in the sense that one cannot operate in more than one paradigm at any given point in time, since in accepting the assumptions of one, we defy the assumptions of all the others.

We offer the four paradigms for consideration in these terms, in the hope that knowledge of the competing points of view will at least make us aware of the boundaries within which we approach our subject.

The Functionalist Paradigm

This paradigm has provided the dominant framework for the conduct of academic sociology and the study of organisations. It represents a perspective which is firmly rooted in the *sociology of regulation* and approaches its subject matter from an *objectivist* point of view. Functionalist theorists have been at the forefront of

the order—conflict debate, and the concepts which we have used to categorise the sociology of regulation apply in varying degrees to all schools of thought within the paradigm. It is characterised by a concern for providing explanations of *the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration, solidarity, need satisfaction* and *actuality*. It approaches these general sociological concerns from a standpoint which tends to be *realist, positivist, determinist* and *nomothetic*.

The functionalist paradigm generates regulative sociology in its most fully developed form. In its overall approach it seeks to provide essentially rational explanations of social affairs. It is a perspective which is highly pragmatic in orientation, concerned to understand society in a way which generates knowledge which can be put to use. It is often problem-orientated in approach, concerned to provide practical solutions to practical problems. It is usually firmly committed to a philosophy of social engineering as a basis of social change and emphasises the importance of understanding order, equilibrium and stability in society and the way in which these can be maintained. It is concerned with the effective 'regulation' and control of social affairs.

As will be apparent from our discussion in Chapter 1 the approach to social science characteristic of the functionalist paradigm is rooted in the tradition of sociological positivism. This reflects the attempt, *par excellence*, to apply the models and methods of the natural sciences to the study of human affairs. Originating in France in the early decades of the nineteenth century, its major influence upon the paradigm has been through the work of social theorists such as Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and Vilfredo Pareto. The functionalist approach to social science tends to assume that the social world is composed of relatively concrete empirical artefacts and relationships which can be identified, studied and measured through approaches derived from the natural sciences. The use of mechanical and biological analogies as a means of modelling and understanding the social world is particularly favoured in many functionalist theories. By way of illustration consider, for example, the work of Durkheim. Central to his position was the idea that 'social facts' exist outside of men's consciousness and restrain men in their everyday activities. The aim was to understand the relationships between these 'objective' social facts and to articulate the sociology which explained the types of 'solidarity' providing the 'social cement' which holds society together. The stability and ordered nature of the natural world was viewed as characterising the world of human affairs. For Durkheim, the task of sociology was to understand the nature of this regulated order.

Since the early decades of the twentieth century, however, the functionalist paradigm has been increasingly influenced by elements from the German idealist tradition of social thought. As will be recalled from our discussion in Chapter 1, this approach reflects assumptions about the nature of social science which stand in opposition to those of sociological positivism. As a result of the work of such theorists as Max Weber, George Simmel and George Herbert Mead, elements of this idealist approach have been utilised within the context of social theories which have attempted to bridge the gulf between the two traditions. In so doing they have forged theoretical perspectives characteristic of the least objectivist region of the paradigm, at its junction with the interpretive paradigm. Such theories have rejected the use of mechanical and biological analogies for studying the social world and have introduced ideas which place emphasis upon the importance of understanding society from the point of view of the actors who are actually engaged in the performance of social activities.

Since the 1940s there has been also an infusion of certain Marxist influences characteristic of the sociology of radical change. These have been incorporated within the paradigm in an attempt to 'radicalise' functionalist theory and rebuff the general charge that

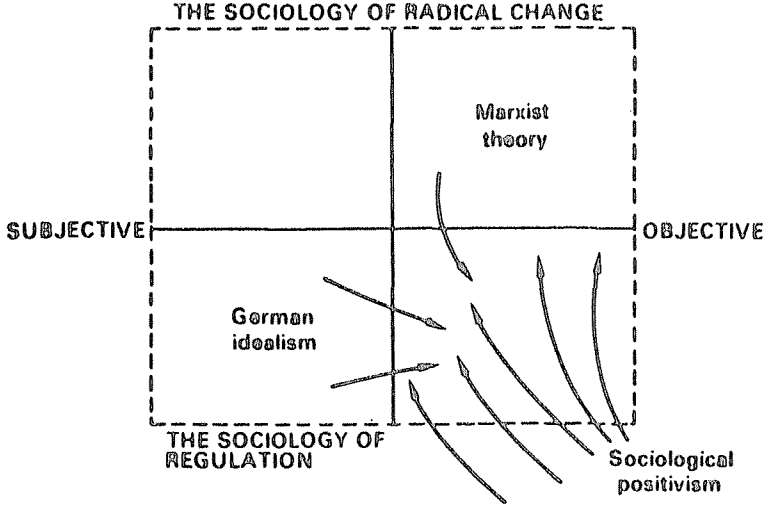


Figure 3.2 Intellectual influences upon the functionalist paradigm

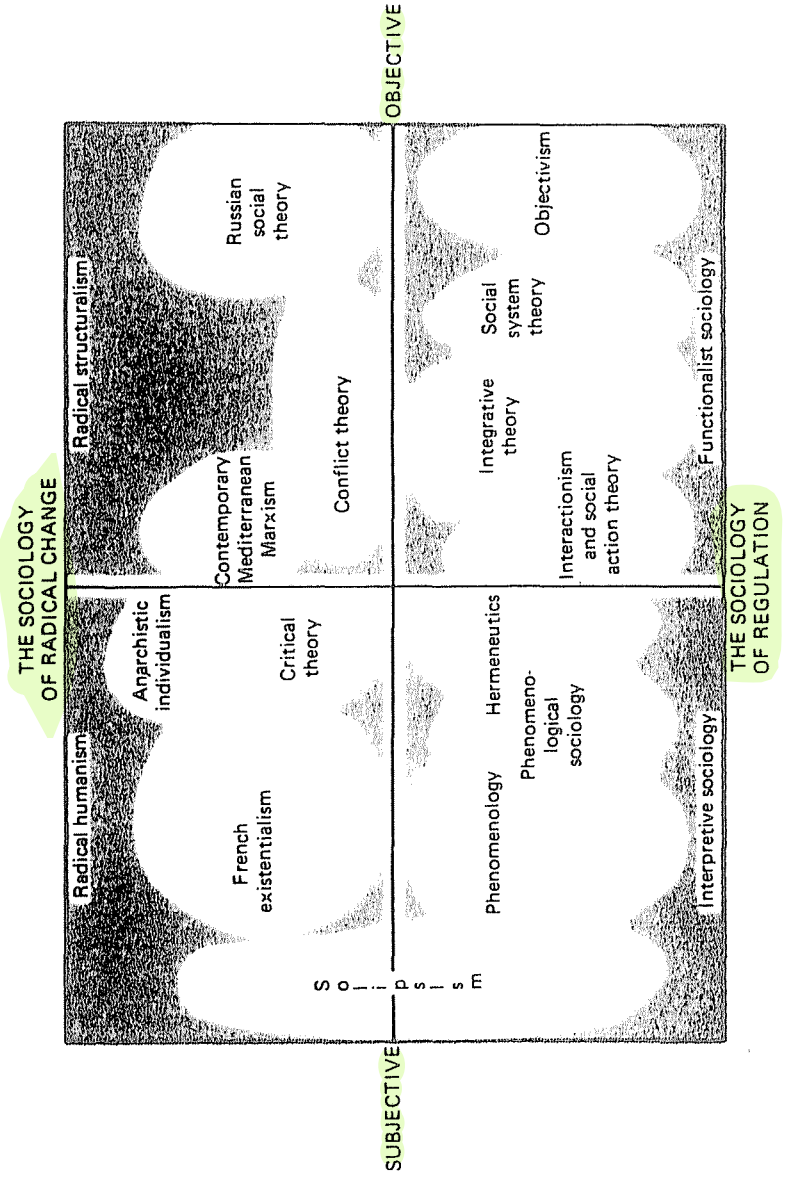
functionalism is essentially conservative and unable to provide explanations for social change. These attempts underwrite the debate examined in the previous chapter as to whether a theory of 'conflict' can be incorporated within the bounds of a theory of 'order' to provide adequate explanations of social affairs.

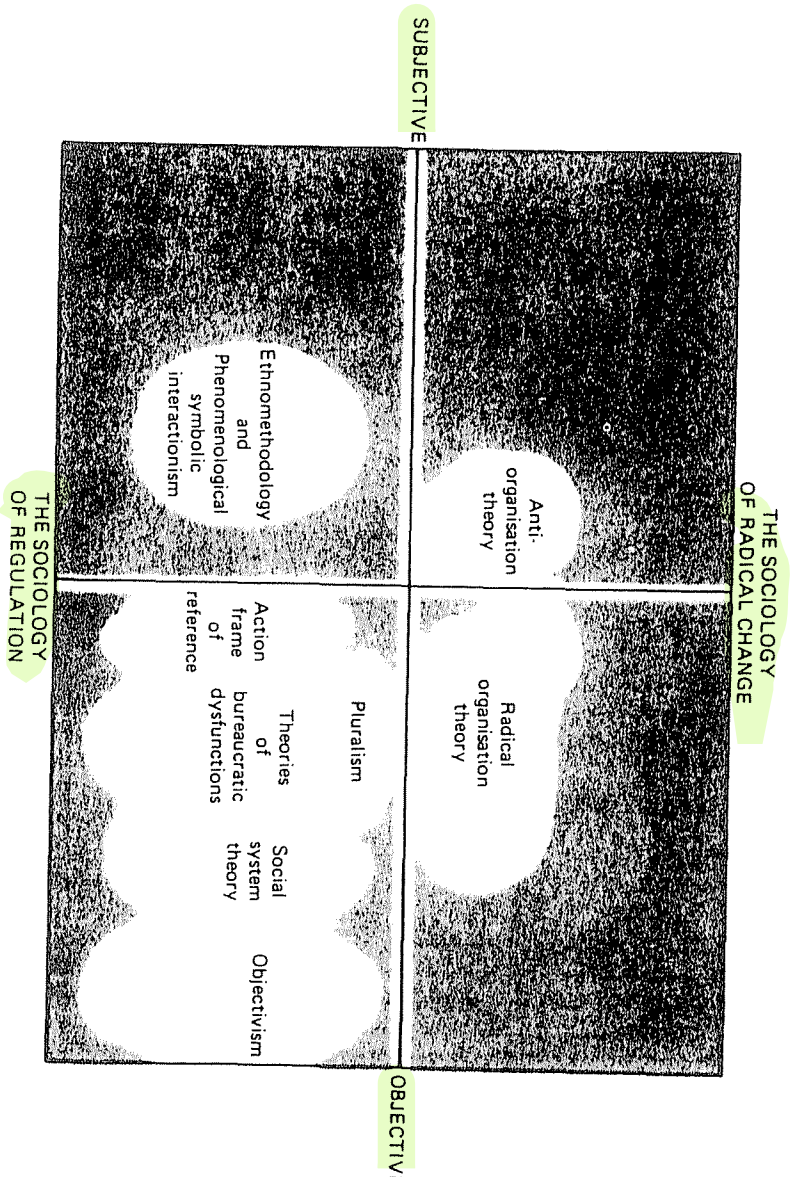
Put very crudely, therefore, the formation of the functionalist paradigm can be understood in terms of the interaction of three sets of intellectual forces, as illustrated in Figure 3.2. Of these, sociological positivism has been the most influential. The competing traditions have been sucked in and used within the context of the functionalist problematic, which emphasises the essentially objectivist nature of the social world and a concern for explanations which emphasise 'regulation' in social affairs. These cross-currents of thought have given rise to a number of distinctive schools of thought within the paradigm, which is characterised by a wide range of theory and internal debate. By way of overview, again somewhat crudely, Figures 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate the four paradigms in terms of the constituent schools of sociological and organisational theory which we shall be exploring later on. As will be apparent, most organisation theorists, industrial sociologists, psychologists and industrial relations theorists approach their subject from within the bounds of the functionalist paradigm.

The Interpretive Paradigm

Theorists located within the context of the interpretive paradigm adopt an approach consonant with the tenets of what we have described as the *sociology of regulation*, though its *subjectivist* approach to the analysis of the social world makes its links with this sociology often implicit rather than explicit. The interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action.

In its approach to social science it tends to be *nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist* and *ideographic*. It sees the social world as an emergent social process which is created by the individuals concerned. Social reality, insofar as it is recognised to have any existence outside the consciousness of any single individual, is regarded as being little more than a network of assumptions and





intersubjectively shared meanings. The ontological status of the social world is viewed as extremely questionable and problematic as far as theorists located within the interpretive paradigm are concerned. Everyday life is accorded the status of a miraculous achievement. Interpretive philosophers and sociologists seek to understand the very basis and source of social reality. They often delve into the depths of human consciousness and subjectivity in their quest for the fundamental meanings which underlie social life.

Given this view of social reality, it is hardly surprising that the commitment of the interpretive sociologists to the sociology of regulation is implicit rather than explicit. Their ontological assumptions rule out a direct interest in the issues involved in the order—conflict debate as such. However, their standpoint is underwritten by the assumption that the world of human affairs is cohesive, ordered and integrated. The problems of conflict, domination, contradiction, potentiality and change play no part in their theoretical framework. They are much more orientated towards obtaining an understanding of the subjectively created social world 'as it is' in terms of an ongoing process.

Interpretive sociology is concerned with understanding the essence of the everyday world. In terms of our analytical schema it is underwritten by an involvement with issues relating to the nature of *the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration and cohesion, solidarity* and *actuality*.[3]

The interpretive paradigm is the direct product of the German idealist tradition of social thought. Its foundations were laid in the work of Kant and reflect a social philosophy which emphasises the essentially spiritual nature of the social world. The idealist tradition was paramount in Germanic thought from the mid-eighteenth century onwards and was closely linked with the romantic movement in literature and the arts. Outside this realm, however, it was of limited interest, until revived in the late 1890s and early years of this century under the influence of the so-called neo-idealist movement. Theorists such as Dilthey, Weber, Husserl and Schutz have made a major contribution towards establishing it as a framework for social analysis, though with varying degrees of commitment to its underlying problematic.

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 illustrate the manner in which the paradigm has been explored as far as our present interest in social theory and the study of organisations is concerned. Whilst there have been a small number of attempts to study organisational concepts and situations from this point of view, the paradigm has not generated

much organisation theory as such. As will become clear from our analysis, there are good reasons for this. The premises of the interpretive paradigm question whether organisations exist in anything but a conceptual sense. Its significance for the study of organisations, therefore, is of the most fundamental kind. It challenges the validity of the ontological assumptions which underwrite functionalist approaches to sociology in general and the study of organisations in particular.

The Radical Humanist Paradigm

The radical humanist paradigm is defined by its concern to develop a *sociology of radical change* from a *subjectivist* standpoint. Its approach to social science has much in common with that of the interpretive paradigm, in that it views the social world from a perspective which tends to be *nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist* and *ideographic*. However, its frame of reference is committed to a view of society which emphasises the importance of overthrowing or transcending the limitations of existing social arrangements.

One of the most basic notions underlying the whole of this paradigm is that the consciousness of man is dominated by the ideological superstructures with which he interacts, and that these drive a cognitive wedge between himself and his true consciousness. This wedge is the wedge of 'alienation' or 'false consciousness', which inhibits or prevents true human fulfilment. The major concern for theorists approaching the human predicament in these terms is with *release* from the constraints which existing social arrangements place upon human development. It is a brand of social theorising designed to provide a critique of the *status quo*. It tends to view society as anti-human and it is concerned to articulate ways in which human beings can transcend the spiritual bonds and fetters which tie them into existing social patterns and thus realise their full potential.

In terms of the elements with which we have sought to conceptualise the sociology of radical change, the radical humanist places most emphasis upon *radical change, modes of domination, emancipation, deprivation* and *potentiality*. The concepts of *structural conflict* and *contradiction* do not figure prominently within this perspective, since they are characteristic of more objectivist views of the social world, such as those presented within the context of the radical structuralist paradigm.

In keeping with its subjectivist approach to social science, the radical humanist perspective places central emphasis upon human consciousness. Its intellectual foundations can be traced to the same source as that of the interpretive paradigm. It derives from the German idealist tradition, particularly as expressed in the work of Kant and Hegel (though as reinterpreted in the writings of the young Marx). It is through Marx that the idealist tradition was first utilised as a basis for a radical social philosophy, and many radical humanists have derived their inspiration from this source. In essence Marx inverted the frame of reference reflected in Hegelian idealism and thus forged the basis for radical humanism. The paradigm has also been much influenced by an infusion of the phenomenological perspective deriving from Husserl.

As we shall illustrate in our detailed discussion of this paradigm, apart from the early work of Marx, interest remained dormant until the 1920s, when Lukács and Gramsci revived interest in subjectivist interpretations of Marxist theory. This interest was taken on by members of the so-called Frankfurt School, which has generated a great deal of debate, particularly through the writings of Habermas and Marcuse. The existentialist philosophy of Sartre also belongs to this paradigm, as do the writings of a group of social theorists as widely diverse as Illich, Castaneda and Laing. All in their various ways share a common concern for the release of consciousness and experience from domination by various aspects of the ideological superstructure of the social world within which men live out their lives. They seek to change the social world through a change in modes of cognition and consciousness.

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 again provide a somewhat rough and ready summary of the manner in which this paradigm has been explored in terms of social theory and the study of organisations. As we shall argue in Chapter 9, the writers who have something to say on organisations from this perspective have laid the basis of a nascent *anti-organisation theory*. The radical humanist paradigm in essence is based upon an inversion of the assumptions which define the functionalist paradigm. It should be no surprise, therefore, that anti-organisation theory inverts the problematic which defines functionalist organisation theory on almost every count.

The Radical Structuralist Paradigm

Theorists located within this paradigm advocate a *sociology of radical change* from an *objectivist* standpoint. Whilst sharing an

approach to science which has many similarities with that of functionalist theory, it is directed at fundamentally different ends. Radical structuralism is committed to *radical change*, *emancipation*, and *potentiality*, in an analysis which emphasises *structural conflict*, *modes of domination*, *contradiction* and *deprivation*. It approaches these general concerns from a standpoint which tends to be *realist*, *positivist*, *determinist* and *nomothetic*.

Whereas the radical humanists forge their perspective by focusing upon 'consciousness' as the basis for a radical critique of society, the radical structuralists concentrate upon structural relationships within a realist social world. They emphasise the fact that radical change is built into the very nature and structure of contemporary society, and they seek to provide explanations of the basic interrelationships within the context of total social formations. There is a wide range of debate within the paradigm, and different theorists stress the role of different social forces as a means of explaining social change. Whilst some focus directly upon the deep-seated internal contradictions, others focus upon the structure and analysis of power relationships. Common to all theorists is the view that contemporary society is characterised by fundamental conflicts which generate radical change through political and economic crises. It is through such conflict and change that the emancipation of men from the social structures in which they live is seen as coming about.

This paradigm owes its major intellectual debt to the work of the mature Marx, after the so-called 'epistemological break' in his work. It is the paradigm to which Marx turned after a decade of active political involvement and as a result of his increasing interest in Darwinian theories of evolution and in political economy. Marx's basic ideas have been subject to a wide range of interpretations in the hands of theorists who have sought to follow his lead. Among these Engels, Plekhanov, Lenin and Bukharin have been particularly influential. Among the leading exponents of the radical structuralist position outside the realm of Russian social theory, the names of Althusser, Poulantzas, Colletti and various Marxist sociologists of the New Left come to mind. Whilst the influence of Marx upon the radical structuralist paradigm is undoubtedly dominant, it is also possible to identify a strong Weberian influence. As we shall argue in later chapters, in recent years a group of social theorists have sought to explore the interface between the thought of Marx and Weber and have generated a distinctive perspective which we describe as 'conflict theory'. It is to this radical structuralist perspective that the work of Dahrendorf belongs, along with that of other theorists such as Rex and Miliband.

Figures 3.3 and 3.4 again provide a general overview of the schools of thought located within the paradigm, which we shall be examining in some detail in Chapters 10 and 11. In British and American sociology the radical structuralist view has received relatively little attention outside the realm of conflict theory. This paradigm, located as it is within a realist view of the social world, has many significant implications for the study of organisations, but they have only been developed in the barest forms. In Chapter 11 we review the work which has been done and the embryonic *radical organisation theory* which it reflects.

Exploring Social Theory

So much, then, for our overview of the four paradigms. Subsequent chapters seek to place flesh upon the bones of this analytical scheme and attempt to demonstrate its power as a tool for exploring social theory.[4] Hopefully, our discussion will do justice to the essentially complex nature of the paradigms and the network of assumptions which they reflect, and will establish the relationships and links between the various perspectives dominating social analysis at the present time. Whilst the focus in Chapters 5, 7, 9 and 11 is upon organisational analysis, the general principles and ideas discussed in the work as a whole clearly have relevance for the exploration of a wide variety of other social science disciplines. The scope for applying the analytical scheme to other fields of study is enormous but unfortunately lies beyond the scope of our present enquiry. However, readers interested in applying the scheme in this way should find little difficulty in proceeding from the sociological analyses presented in Chapters 4, 6, 8, and 10 to an analysis of the literature in their own sphere of specialised interest.

Notes and References

1. For a full discussion of the role of paradigms in scientific development, see Kuhn (1970). In his analysis, paradigms are defined as 'universally recognised scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a

community of practitioners' (p. viii). Paradigms are regarded as governing the progress of what is called 'normal science', in which 'the scientist's work is devoted to the articulation and wider application of the accepted paradigm, which is not itself questioned or criticised. Scientific problems are regarded as puzzles, as problems which are known to have a solution within the framework of assumptions implicitly or explicitly embodied in the paradigm. If a puzzle is not solved, the fault lies in the scientist, and not in the paradigm' (Keat and Urry 1975, p. 55). 'Normal science' contrasts with relatively brief periods of 'revolutionary science', in which 'the scientist is confronted by increasingly perplexing anomalies, which call into question the paradigm itself. Scientific revolution occurs when a new paradigm emerges, and becomes accepted by the scientific community' (ibid., p. 55).

We are using the term 'paradigm' in a broader sense than that intended by Kuhn. Within the context of the present work we are arguing that social theory can be conveniently understood in terms of the co-existence of four distinct and rival paradigms defined by very basic meta-theoretical assumptions in relation to the nature of science and society. 'Paradigms', 'problematics', 'alternative realities', 'frames of reference', 'forms of life' and 'universe of discourse' are all related conceptualisations although of course they are *not* synonymous.

2. Some *inter*-paradigm debate is also possible. Giddens maintains 'that all paradigms . . . are mediated by others' and that within 'normal science' scientists are aware of *other* paradigms. He posits that: 'The process of learning a paradigm . . . is also the process of learning what that paradigm is not' (1976, pp. 142–4).

   Interestingly, he confines his discussion to the mediation of one paradigm by another one. We believe that a model of *four* conflicting paradigms within sociology is more accurate and that academics' knowledge of 'scientists' within the other three paradigms is likely to be very sketchy in some cases. Relations between paradigms are perhaps better described in terms of 'disinterested hostility' rather than 'debate'.

3. The notion of need satisfaction derives from the use of a biological analogy of an organism and plays no part in interpretive sociology.

4. The sociological concerns of recent years have resulted in a

number of works which have aimed to chart a path through the social science literature by reducing the variables of sociological analysis to a number of key dimensions. Those of Dahrendorf (1959), Wallace (1969), Gouldner (1970), Friedrichs (1970), Dawe (1970), Robertson (1974), Keat and Urry (1975), Strasser (1976) and Benton (1977) all readily come to mind. In a sense our work adds to this literature. Had space permitted, we would have liked to demonstrate the precise way in which the schemes proposed by these various authors all fall, in a partial way, *within* the bounds of the scheme developed here.

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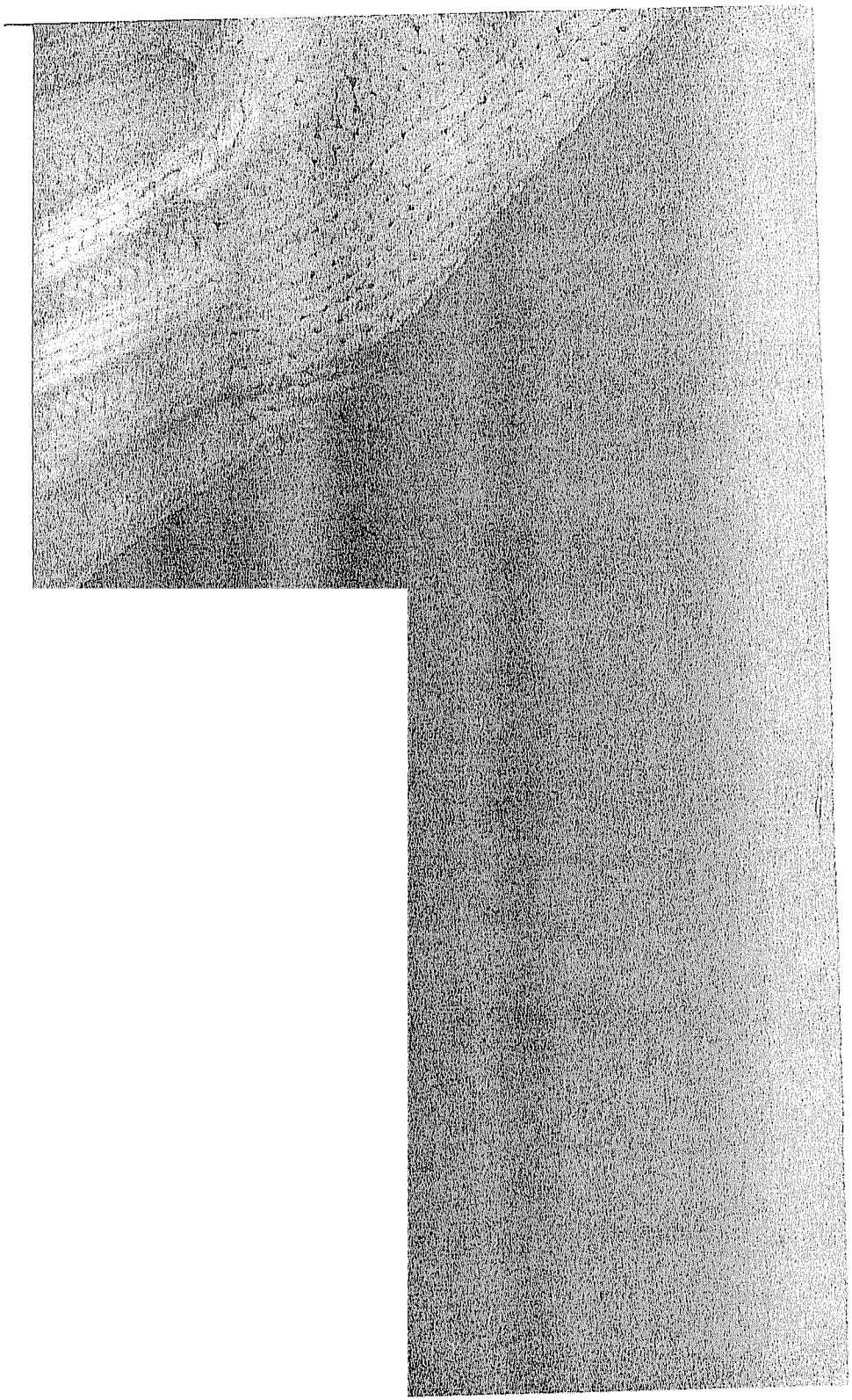

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