

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

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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

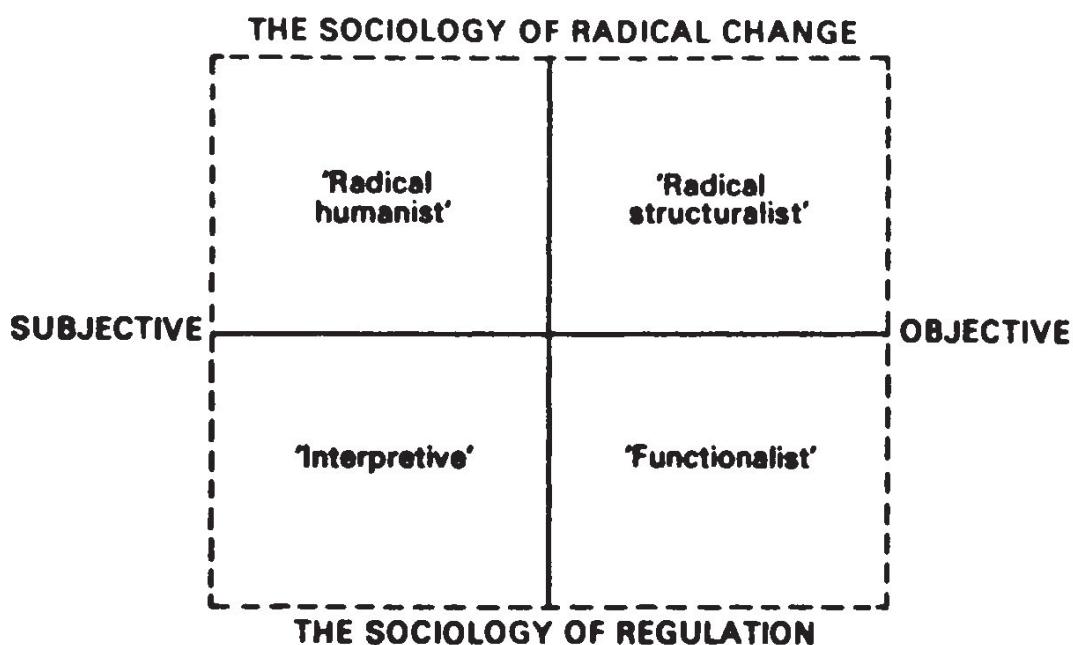


Figure 3.1 Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory

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-

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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

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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 characteris-

ing 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

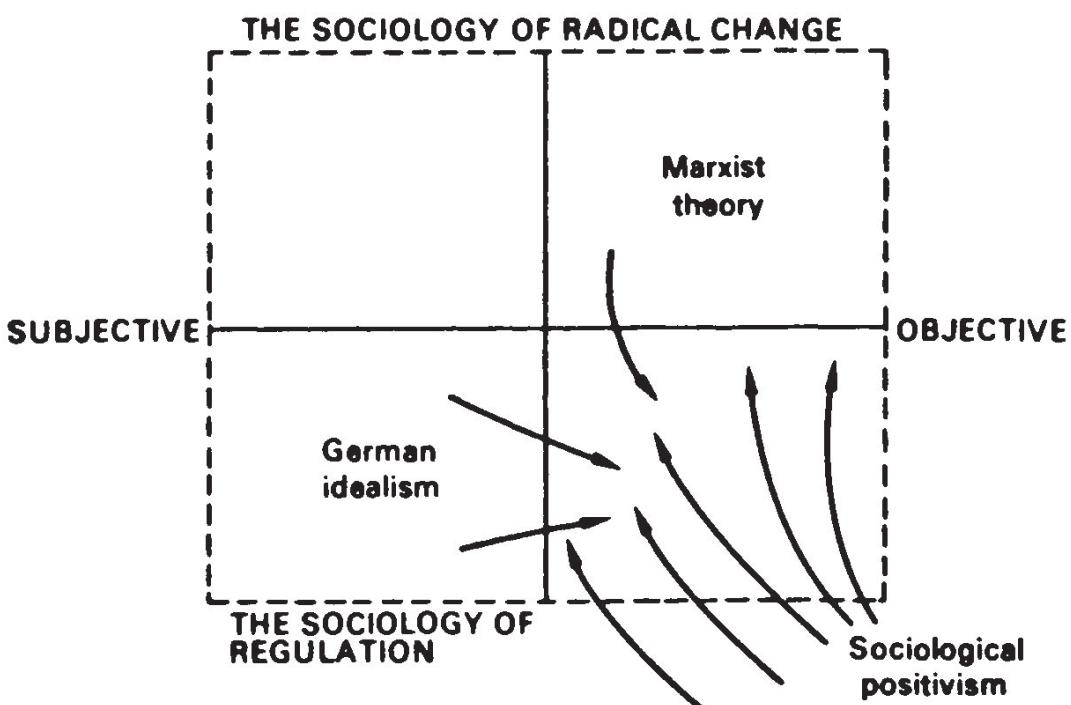


Figure 3.2 Intellectual influences upon the functionalist paradigm

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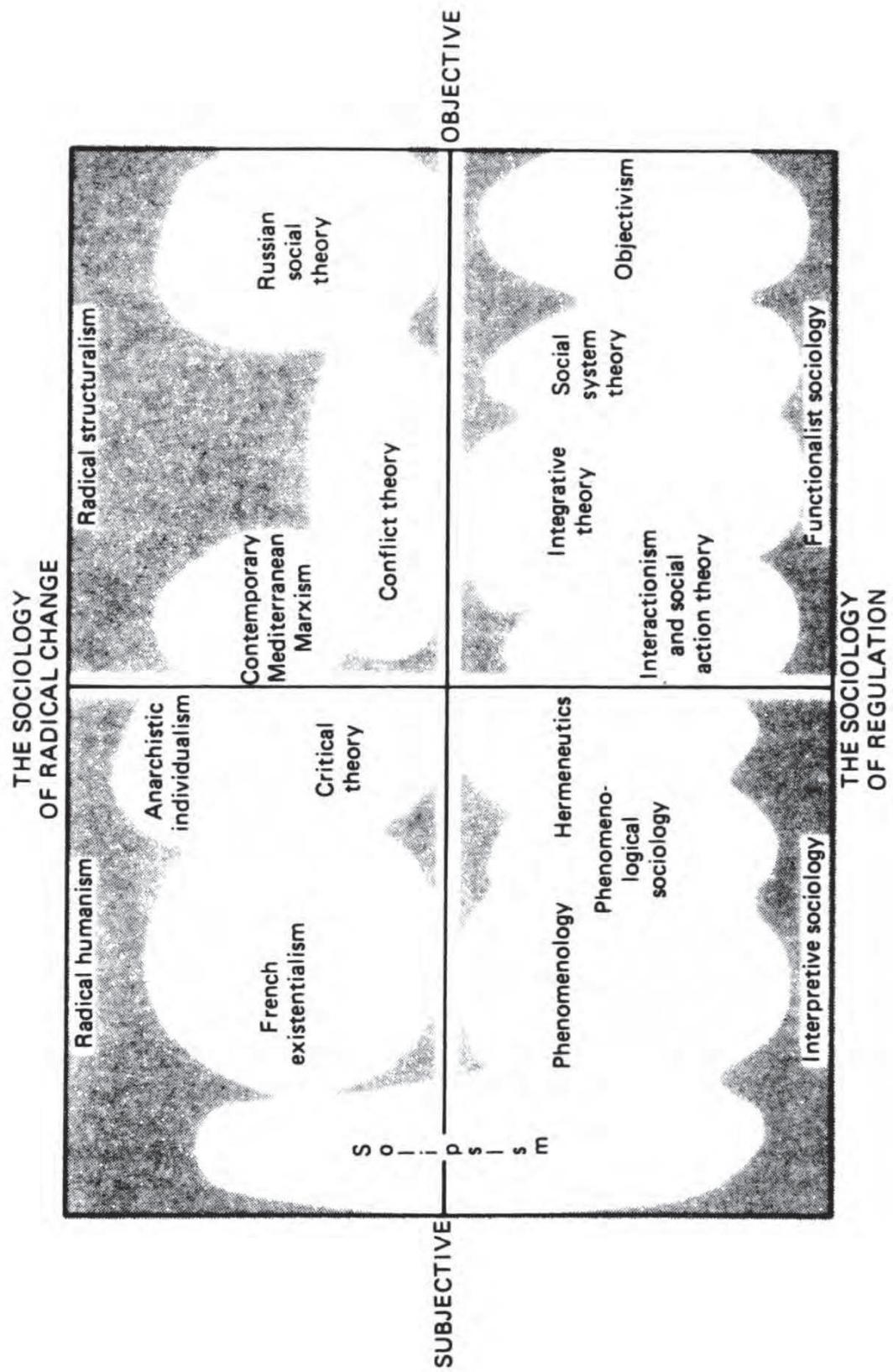
functionalism is essentially conservative and unable to provide explanations for social change. These attempts underwrite the debate examined in the previous chapter as to whether a theory of 'conflict' can be incorporated within the bounds of a theory of 'order' to provide adequate explanations of social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



THE SOCIOLOGY
OF RADICAL CHANGE

OBJECTIVE

SUBJECTIVE

THE SOCIOLOGY
OF REGULATION

Anti-
organisation
theory

Radical
organisation
theory

Pluralism

Ethnomethodology
and
Phenomenological
symbolic
interactionism

Social
system
theory

Theories
of
bureaucratic
dysfunctions

Objectivism

Action
frame
of
reference

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

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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

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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

dorf 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

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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.