A

ABSOLUTE POVERTY   Also known as subsistence poverty, this is an idea of **poverty** derived from the minimum requirements for subsistence: what a person must have to live and to make a living.

ABSOLUTE RATES OF MOBILITY   We can describe social mobility in absolute or relative terms. The absolute rate of mobility is the proportion of people in a particular social **class** who move up or down in the socio-economic hierarchy. Relative social mobility is the proportion of one social class that moves up or down compared with the proportion of another class that moves. The distinction is important because the two measures can give a very different impression of the degree of social mobility.

ABSOLUTISM   This denotes a political regime in which the ruler (usually a monarch) is not constrained in the exercise of power either by custom or by rule of law, and which has an effective centralised administration so that the ruler's will can be turned into action. The idea plays an important part in models of political evolution. Max **Weber** saw the absolutist state as a progressive stage between feudalism and modern capitalism: it created a bureaucratic administration, gradually gained a monopoly of the legitimate use of force, and used that force to impose law and order and hence

predictability. While this fits the history of western Europe, in eastern Europe and other parts of the world absolutism retarded rather than encouraged progress.

ABSTRACTED EMPIRICISM   C. Wright **Mills** in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) derided social scientists who allowed the primary task of understanding to be subverted by technical issues of data collection and analysis. Mills thought his colleagues misled by a desire to imitate the natural sciences. Excessive concern with the internal validity of statistical techniques and the assumption that if it could not be quantified, it was not evidence, meant that what passed for sociology was actually closer to alchemy: elegant but pointless. Worse, because the survey data favoured by empiricists related to individuals (e.g. their attitudes or their demographic characteristics), the importance of social structure was under-estimated. Mills's critique is a useful caution against losing sight of the purpose of research, but its blanket application as an argument against quantitative research is improper. Empirically-minded historical sociologists (such as Charles Tilly) and students of social mobility (such as John **Goldthorpe**) have ably demonstrated that it is possible to combine statistical and technical sophistication in data collection and analysis with insightful theory and a due appreciation of the role of social forces.

ACCOMMODATION   When used to describe relations between discrete populations (defined, for example, by ethnicity or religion) the term suggests groups finding ways of co-existing without losing their defining characteristics. It is often contrasted with acculturation: the process in which a minority is absorbed into the majority and entirely loses its distinctiveness. Assimilation falls somewhere between the two. Robert **Park** described assimilation as achieving a degree of cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence. Only extreme **nativists** took this to mean the complete eradication of cultural distinctions. With wide-scale migration (e.g. of Muslims to western Europe), the extent to which the modern state can or should require religio-ethnic minorities to accommodate has become an important political issue.

ACCOUNTS   The descriptions and justifications that people (or 'actors') give of their actions. Sociologists differ in the extent to which they regard actors' accounts as central to the sociological enterprise. Those who think sociology should explain meaningful social action insist that such accounts are essential to understanding the motives and reasoning that make action meaningful. Scholars (such as structuralist Marxists), who regard external social forces as the primary causes of conduct, pay little attention to actors' accounts because they cannot suppose that people are fully or even dimly aware of what causes them to act in one way rather than another.

For those who are interested in accounts there is always a problem of knowing to what extent accounts can be taken as reliable guides to the past (especially those given in some circumstance where the account is intended to persuade: courtroom testimony, religious testimonies, chat-show confessions). The point is not so much that people lie (though they do); it is that the needs of the present often cause us to re-interpret the past. Validity is further challenged by our habit of retrospective re-valuation. We cannot help but see our past from our present. As our lives change, so does the way we recollect, view, interpret and account for our past.

Ethnomethodology argues the intriguing case that accounts should be the primary focus of sociological study, not for what they can tell us about people's motives, but for what they tell us about the social relations involved in representing our motives to each other and what they reveal about the mechanics of 'account giving'.

See **vocabularies of motive**.

ACCULTURATION   See **accommodation**.

ACEPHALOUS   From the Greek meaning 'without a head', this term is used to describe a political system with no single overarching authority: the traditional African lineage political system, where authority is exercised at the level of the **clan** or the lineage segment, is an example.

ACHIEVED STATUS   See **status**, ascribed.

ACHIEVEMENT   This is the successful accomplishment or performance of some socially defined task. Talcott **Parsons** regarded it as a defining characteristic of modern societies that people were recruited or selected for particular social roles by achievement (acquiring specific credentials or qualifications, for example) rather than by **ascription**. Acquiring credentials does play a much greater part in attaining social positions in modern than in traditional societies: for example, civil service, church, army and police officials are now trained and tested for promotion; they do not inherit or buy their offices. But it remains the case that inherited and ascribed characteristics

such as race and gender continue to play a major part in people's **life-chances** and their social **stratification**.

ACTION   Any unit or sequence of individual social activity that is purposeful and involves deliberation is action. The implied contrast is with **behaviour**. This useful pairing allows us to range conduct on a scale according to the amount of conscious deliberation, thought or choice involved. At the behaviour end we would place conduct which is in some sense driven by forces beyond our knowledge and control. Such forces can be internal (e.g. a biological reflex or an instinct) or external (e.g. as when we uncritically or even unknowingly accept the preferences of our social class). At the action end we would place conduct based on fully-conscious decision-making. Social science disciplines and schools within them are often defined by their general preference to see human conduct as action or behaviour. Psychologists and biologists (especially geneticists) tend to see behaviour where sociologists see action. Within sociology, Weberian and symbolic interactionists tend to see action where structuralists (especially Marxists) see behaviour.

See **agency and structure, Blumer,
Giddens, Luhmann, Parsons.**

ACTION RESEARCH   This is a type of research in which the researcher not only studies some social phenomenon but assists in changing it, often in an experimental manner. Examples could include assessments of new criminal-justice proposals according to which perpetrators of crime are obliged to meet their victims and to listen to victims' accounts of the effects of the crimes. Such approaches reflect the fact that much social research is commissioned by groups and agencies which wish to understand some problem so as to solve it. Although the

phrase is associated with the 1960s, the idea that researchers have a moral obligation to assist their subjects has an enduring appeal to those who study groups which they believe to be relatively disadvantaged. If imposed on all sociological work, such an injunction would create obvious problems for the discipline; we would only be able to study people of whom we approved.

See **ethics of research, value-freedom.**

ACTION THEORY   A key question in sociology concerns the primary focus of the enterprise: do we study social action or social structure? Max **Weber** and those influenced by him, see sociology as the explanation of social action (hence action theory) and understanding actors' meanings, purposes, beliefs and values as the essential first step in that work.

Weber distinguished four main types of action: traditional or customary (because our people have always done it like this); affective (because it is emotionally satisfying); value-oriented (because it is the right thing to do); and instrumental (because it is the most effective way to achieve a certain end).

Implicit in action theory is the assumption that people are by and large rational; that they act for what count for them as good reasons. However, as Weber's four types show, this rationality is not confined to the very narrow notion of 'maximising benefits' that economists use; in Weber's view it may be perfectly rational to follow a custom (such as marrying one's third cousin) even when personal advantage might be maximised by marrying a stranger.

The contrast between action theory and various forms of **structuralist** sociology is often exaggerated. Action theorists have generally paid considerable attention to the social structures that shape individual action and are in turn shaped by it. Structuralists generally identify social structures by, and illustrate them with, examples of individual action.

ACTION FRAME OF REFERENCE   Talcott **Parsons** elaborated a complex theory that begins with a systematic analysis of action in which people choose between competing ends and means in circumstances that limit those choices socially and physically. The main social limits are norms and values. From these foundational concepts, Parsons generates a complex model of the **social system** in which, critics argue, the choosing individual gradually disappears and the social system with its norms and values becomes the primary determinant of behaviour.

ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY   This approach, associated primarily with French social scientists Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, examines how innovations, usually in knowledge or technology, become established in society. They argue for a 'sociology of translation', the central claim of which is that innovations succeed because other actors' interests are translated into the new enterprise. Latour argues, for example, that Pasteur's famous work on disease prevention succeeded because Pasteur translated the interests of vets, farmers and livestock into his research programme: pasteurisation came to appear to be in the interests of them all. Latour and Callon stress that innovations typically work because their proponents are skilled at building alliances (actor-networks) between many heterogeneous agents; such alliances can include human actors (such as vets) and non-human ones (such as bacteria or sheep).

Critics have focused on two issues. First there is the problem of identifying the 'interests' of non-human actors. Second, they worry about the circularity of the argument that conflicts over innovation are won by the stronger alliance. The problem is that the strength of an alliance is finally demonstrated by the fact that it won the controversy. The supposed strength explains the victory but the only evidence of the strength is the victory itself.

ADAPTATION   This denotes the way in which social systems of any kind (the family, an organisation such as a school, the nation-state) respond to their environment. In **structural-functionalism**, adaptation is one of the four functional pre-requisites that all social systems must satisfy if they are to survive.

AD HOC HYPOTHESIS   This signifies a subsidiary proposition added to a theory to save it from **refutation**. In the philosophy of science developed by Karl **Popper** the reliance on ad hoc hypotheses to plug holes is the defining mark of bogus science and he cites **Marxism** and Freudianism as two intellectual systems preserved from **falsification** only by ad hocery.

AD-HOCING   This term is employed by ethnomethodologists to characterise reasoning and description in everyday interaction. Since the words used in everyday speech are not subject to rigorous definition there can be no set criteria for establishing what other people mean or are talking about. If you are trying to describe someone whom you met at a party there is no single correct description of them. Instead your description is taken as adequate when other people claim to recognise the description. In the same way, all descriptions are taken to be ad hoc; their adequacy can only be adjudged in practical terms.

ADJACENCY PAIR   This term was introduced by proponents of **conversation analysis** to refer to turns at talk that occur in patterned pairs, such as questions and answers, or greetings and returned greetings, or invitations and acceptances/declinings. The point is not that questions are usually followed by answers but that questions make answers normatively expected. The failure to supply an answer can thus be heard as the second speaker's responsibility. Failure to supply an answer may be viewed as being evasive or slippery. To fail to

return a greeting can be to snub someone. Conversation analysts suggest that it is from these normative minutiae that the orderliness of everyday interaction is built.

ADOLESCENCE   This denotes the emotional and behavioural states supposedly associated with becoming an adult, the period in the life-cycle between childhood and adulthood and, more specifically, the period when the physical changes associated with biological puberty occur but the person's sexual maturity is not yet socially recognised. Although most sociologists accept that biological changes do affect character, so that some of the emotional turbulence now commonly expected of adolescents can be explained by biology, we also recognise that there is a large element of social construction in adolescence: the prosperity of modern societies has allowed the expansion of the indeterminate period between childhood and adulthood and the creation of distinctive **youth cultures**.

ADORNO, THEODOR (1903–69)   A leading member of the **Frankfurt School**, Adorno fled Germany in 1934 for the USA. His work, often expressed in deliberately obscure language, ranged widely but he is best known for his criticisms of popular culture (which he saw as an industrial product designed to manipulate the masses) and for his contribution to *The Authoritarian Personality* (1994), a seminal influence on the study of right-wing extremism. He was highly disdainful of a vision of sociology as a primarily or exclusively empirical enterprise because it would lack the critical edge which, as a Marxist, he regarded as the main point of social theory.

ADVANCED CAPITALISM   In Marxist theory the final stage of the evolution of capitalism is characterised by concentration of ownership and increasing intervention in the economy by the state as it tries to manage increasingly common and virulent economic crises. This phase supposedly culminates in the final crisis and the transition to socialism. Contrary to Marxist expectations, of course, capitalism has shown itself remarkably robust and thus remains in its advanced stage. Late capitalism is not itself static and sociologists continue to disagree over how best to characterise present-day capitalist society.

See **globalisation, risk society, end-of-history**.

AETIOLOGY   See **etiology**.

AFFECT   This denotes the emotional or feeling element (as distinct from the purely cognitive element) of mental experience. What I am doing when I learn my father has died is cognitive; what I am doing when I feel saddened by that knowledge is affective.

AFFECTIVE DISORDERS   Disorders of the emotions such as anxiety and depression, as distinct from cognitive disorders, form one of the major groupings of types of mental illness.

AFFECTIVE INDIVIDUALISM   Social historians such as Lawrence Stone believe that there was a radical change in the nature of the family in 18th-century England (which then spread globally). Previously, families had been deeply embedded in extended kinship networks and wider communities and the family was not the primary focus for the emotional attachments of its members. Sex was as much a matter of creating new personnel as a source of pleasure. Marriage itself was instrumental in that economic and political advantage often played a greater part than emotional ties in the choice of partners. With industrialisation the family shrank in size and in social roles. The modern domesticated

nuclear family is characterised by close emotional ties, domestic privacy and the careful rearing of children for expressive rather than instrumental reasons. Affective individualism captures the essence of wider changes: 'affective' because emotional attachment displaces more mundane and practical considerations and 'individualism' because the modern family is constructed around the bond of personal attraction between free-acting individuals.

As always with such grand attempts to encapsulate the essence of a major change, the notion can be criticised for exaggerating the extent of change and too closely associating it with particular causes. However, affective individualism does accurately capture a real difference between families of the modern western world and those either of feudal Europe or many parts of the non-industrialised world.

AFFECTIVE INVOLVEMENT; AFFECTIVE NEUTRALITY See **pattern variables**.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION See **positive discrimination**.

AFFLUENT SOCIETY John K. **Galbraith**'s *The Affluent Society* (1958) drew attention to a tension in the USA: it was indeed affluent but the private prosperity of the majority was accompanied by a good deal of public squalor and there was a significant minority who had not only been left behind economically but also in effect dis-enfranchised. Arguably the two problems remain with us and have been extended globally: individual affluence comes at the expense of public services and also creates major environmental costs. Moreover, in many economies where the average standard of living has increased markedly, the poorest, though they may also have prospered, have fallen far enough behind the average to be in various ways excluded from **civil society**.

See **citizen**.

AFFLUENT WORKER This term was popularised by the titles of three volumes from a seminal 1960s British project led by John **Goldthorpe** and David Lockwood. The study of affluent manual workers in the British car industry was intended to test the **embourgeoisment** (or 'becoming middle class') thesis. Marxist theories suppose the working class is defined by its lack of ownership of the means of production (and hence lack of power). The embourgeoisment alternative is that attitudes and behaviour are influenced more by wealth than by ownership and control; as workers become better paid they will become more like the middle classes. The Affluent Worker studies came to importantly different conclusions. These workers had become more like the middle class in some respects (e.g. buying their own houses and favouring domestic over community leisure activities) but they continued to vote for the Labour party and remained active in trade unions. In these activities, rational self-interest was more important than traditional community loyalties; 'instrumental collectivism' had replaced class solidarity.

See **orientations to work**.

AGE SETS These are broad age bands that define the social status, roles and patterns of behaviour appropriate for those who belong to them. Graduation from one age set to another is often marked by rituals or **rites of passage**. In many simple societies, age sets are a crucial element of the social structure, but even in industrial societies age remains an important variable for the allocation of legal rights and responsibilities.

AGEING   The chronological process of growing older obviously has a biological basis: the human physique and its associated capacities change over time in a manner that is regular, even if the timing of changes varies from person to person. Sociological interest in ageing concentrates on the social expectations that we have of the elderly. At its simplest, there is a clear contrast between the way that many traditional societies regard their oldest members (as repositories of wisdom and experience) and the relatively low status that modern societies offer the elderly.

AGEISM   The success of campaigns to outlaw racism and sexism inspired the creation of this term to describe discrimination based on negative stereotypes about the elderly and their capacities.

AGENTS OF SOCIAL CONTROL   This term is used mainly in **critical sociology** to describe a variety of agencies that contribute to ensuring that members of society conform. In addition to such obvious ones as the police, courts and prisons, the term would also embrace social workers, teachers, clergymen and others whose controlling influence is not so immediate but is nonetheless taken to be significant.

AGENCY AND STRUCTURE   A major fault line in sociology concerns the relative freedom of individuals. Beyond such obvious constraints as the rule of the law and the power of the police, courts and prisons, there are more abstract social forces and structures, and sociologists differ in the relative weight they assign such structures in determining individual thought and action. Agency denotes individual capacity for free thought and action; structure denotes the constraints on individuals that result from the fact that repeated patterns of action, legitimated by ideologies, form the environment that shapes us (e.g. as we are socialised into a particular set of beliefs, values and attitudes in childhood) and limits our actions (by, for example, allocating the resources necessary for certain actions in an uneven manner). Clearly there are elements of social structure that materially affect our lives; the opportunities open to women are not the same as those open to men and the difference is a product not just of biological differences but of the social significance that societies give to those biological differences. Very few sociologists would deny the importance of both agency and structure but they differ systematically in their views of the proper focus for sociology; and precisely the extent to which, and the manner in which, individual action is determined by social forces. That is, there is a division about what sociologists should study and there is a separate division about how we expect to explain that which we study.

Structural-functionalists and Marxists believe that that proper subject of sociology is not the individual but the social structure and the relationships between elements of that structure. In this view, individuals are of interest only as the carriers of properties of the structure. Emile **Durkheim** studied **suicide** not because he was interested in the motives of those who kill themselves but because he believed certain types of suicide and the rates at which they occur are characteristics of a certain type of society. At the other end, Weberian sociology, **phenomenology** and **symbolic interactionism** take social action as the proper focus for sociology study.

Analytically separate from the question of what sociology should study is the issue of where we expect to find the effective cause of whatever interests us.

See **structuration**.

AID   This encompasses a variety of resources (such as food, technical expertise,

military hardware, medicines and capital) that are given to less developed countries by the developed world. Social scientists differ markedly in their assessment of the effects of aid. **Modernisation** theory supposes that such aid is usually helpful to development; **dependency theory** sees it as a novel form of colonial oppression that maintains, rather then reduces, the advantage of the industrial capitalist West by, for example, opening up markets for western exports or by supporting governments which are the West's political allies. In the last quarter of the 20th century the issue of aid became inseparable from that of international debt since many developing countries became impoverished as a result of colossal, ill-advised loans taken out in the 1970s.

See **debt crisis**.

ALIENATION   The term is very widely used to convey a sense of improper loss or detachment. Originally used in the active form, 'to alienate' meant to remove something from someone; 'alienation' was thus a particular form of theft or confiscation. This was superseded by the passive form so that 'to be alienated' no longer meant to have been stolen and came to mean instead 'to have had something stolen from you' and shifted from property to human relations. Alienation was the state of not having proper human relations.

The word was popularised by Karl **Marx** (1970) in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* as a description for the estrangement of people from their true human nature. People are essentially creative. They re-shape the material world into objects and in so doing put some of themselves into the things they make: the products of their labour. In pre-capitalist society, the making of objects for one's own use or for fair exchange was properly human. In capitalist society, because the workers do not own the means of production but have to sell their labour, they are allegedly 'alienated' in four senses:

(a) from the product of their work because they have no control over the fate of the goods they produce; (b) from the act of production itself because work is no longer a creative act but is merely a commodity that is bought and sold; (c) from their 'species being' because work under capitalism lacks what should be its distinctly human quality; and (d) from each other because what should be social relations of exchange are replaced by the market relationships of buying and selling.

For Marx and Marxists the above is the scientific analysis of social realities. Alienation is not a fancy name for unhappiness; workers under capitalism are alienated whether they appreciate it or not.

Although Marxists present their analysis of labour under capitalism as a scientific theory, it rests on an untestable (and many would argue, unusual) assertion about what humans are really like: desirous of expressing themselves through work. Were we to start by asserting that people are essentially comfort-seeking and that what they really need is a pleasant, safe and secure life, then there would be no reason to suppose that capitalism was any more alienating than other economic systems; all could be judged by the extent to which they deliver benefits. The whole approach is open to the even-more damning criticism that by starting with a utopian view of the purpose of human production and exchange, it misses the fact that the working lives of most serfs and peasants in pre-capitalist societies were generally less pleasant than those of workers under industrial capitalism which, however alienated they might be, were markedly more prosperous.

Since Marx's time, the term has been broadened to include almost any sort of undesired separation and it is often psychologised so that it denotes personal unhappiness at some state of affairs, not the state of affairs itself. In some usages it comes close to Emile **Durkheim**'s notion of **anomie**; in others to Max **Weber**'s account of responses to the large-scale impersonal rational bureaucracies of the modern world.

In the 1960s the term returned again to the sociology of work in Robert Blauner's (1964) *Alienation and Freedom*. He identified various forms of alienation that resulted from different types of modern work; each linked to the degree of personal control (or, as in the title 'freedom') inherent in different ways of working. In a developmental model, he argued that as production moved from craft work, through the use of machines, to the factory assembly-line, the degree of personal control went down and that of alienation rose. However, he concluded that in the final stage – that of automated continuous-flow production – the control of the labour process returned to the worker as the job became more complex and hence more satisfying.

See **de-skilling**.

ALTERITY   This synonym for 'otherness' is popular in **postmodernist** writing. Learning to distinguish between the self and other is an essential part of child development and a vital tool for ordering our perceptions of the world. It may be taken further to construct whole classes of people as 'other' and hence not fully human, and then to project on to that class qualities we fear and reject in ourselves. Once we assign qualities to people by including them in such categories we have prejudice and **stereotyping**.

See **othering**.

ALTHUSSER, LOUIS (1918–90)   A French structuralist Marxist, Althusser became famous in the late 1960s for his attempt to re-assert a scientific form of Marxism against the rather woolly and humanistic forms it had taken. He particularly rejected the centrality of the notion of **alienation** and the importance of Karl **Marx**'s early works in favour of *Das Kapital*, which, somewhat implausibly, he claimed to be science (and as important

science) as the work of Galileo or Charles Darwin. In his later years he became sceptical of this claim and, indeed, seems to have recanted most of his views. Now barely read, Althusser was extremely popular in the 1970s. His standing fell with that of the French Communist party (of which he was the leading intellectual). He was always psychologically unstable and in 1980 he murdered his wife. He passed his remaining decade in various secure psychiatric institutions.

His re-reading of the mature works of Marx generated a number of phrases (**ideological state apparatuses**, **repressive state apparatuses**, **interpellation**, **over-determination**) which were very popular for a short time. In some ways he softened Marxism: he allowed that the superstructure (in particular ideology and politics) shaped the context for the economic base; he treated ideology as a collection of real social relations rather than as an illusion; and, for someone who was essentially a structuralist, he gave individuals unusual prominence as the agents of social relations. For all that, he has left little trace on non-Marxist social science, mostly because he undertook little empirical social research.

ALTRUISM   Generally altruism is a concern for others rather than for oneself. Altruistic behaviour is often contrasted with egoistic or selfish behaviour (for example in Emile **Durkheim**'s theory of **suicide**).

ALTRUISTIC SUICIDE   See **suicide**.

AMBIVALENCE   This signifies the presence in one person at the same time of two competing or conflicting emotions or attitudes. It is a particularly important idea for Sigmund **Freud** who reported the closeness of love and hate.

AMPLIFICATION OF DEVIANCE   See **deviancy amplification**.

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE (ANOVA) This is a statistical procedure used to test differences between the distribution around the means (see **measures of central tendency**) of some characteristic within and between various groups. For example, we might wish to know how social class affects life expectancy. We would collect information about age at death and social class, divide the sample into, say, five social classes, and then see how the degree of variation within any of the social classes compares with the difference between the five classes. If the variation within each class is markedly less than the variation between them, then we would conclude that social class is strongly associated with (and in this case therefore in all likelihood a major determinant of) life expectancy.

ANALYTIC INDUCTION This denotes a method of analysis common to forms of qualitative sociology. The analyst formulates a hypothesis on the basis of known cases and then progressively modifies it to accommodate 'decisive negative cases': observations that do not fit the starting hypothesis. As with any method of induction, the quality of the conclusions depends on the willingness of the analyst to continue to seek out contrary or anomalous cases. The procedure must also be used sensitively since endless modification of the original hypothesis can lead to a descent into blandness, with successive modifications taking the form of **ad hoc hypotheses**.

Ordinary people regularly practise a form of lay sociology. What should make the explanations offered by professional sociologists more compelling is that, while lay people will often be satisfied once they find an explanation that fits the very limited number of cases that have come to their attention (all sociologists are bearded because the two sociologists I know have beards), the professional will exhaustively seek out further cases. Analytical induction need not depend, however, on the professionalism of any one analyst because the competitive nature of the profession should ensure that critics will challenge any hypothesis by seeking out further cases that do not fit.

See **grounded theory**.

ANIMISM Most generally, animism is the belief that natural objects and phenomena (such as trees, stones and winds) have souls. In 19th-century evolutionary theories of religion, it was treated as the simplest form of religious belief system, common to peoples at the most primitive level of social evolution. Such evolutionary models were thoroughly partisan in that they placed the religion of those people who promoted them (western European liberal Christians) at the peak of evolution. Nowadays, students of religion tend to be more concerned with the social functions than with the detailed content of religious belief systems and the tendency is to suppose that all religions serve similar purposes.

ANNALES SCHOOL An important group of French social historians was associated with the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (later titled *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations* and then *Annales. Histoire. Science Sociales*) founded by Lucien Febvre and Marc **Bloch** in 1929. The school opposed the conventional approach to history as the chronology of major political events and stressed instead the importance of social history, social structure and long-term historical trends. The school has made major contributions to classical debates in sociology (such as the explanation of the transition from feudalism to capitalism). The work of Fernand Braudel has been particularly influential for modern social science through Immanuel Wallerstein's **world-systems theory**.

ANOMIE   From the Greek 'a-nomos' or 'without rules', this is a social condition of breakdown and confusion associated with either the absence of group rules or serious conflict over them. The first major use in sociology is associated with Emile **Durkheim**'s *Division of Labour in Society* (1893) and *Suicide* (1897).

For all that Durkheim insisted that sociology should study societies and not individuals, his use of anomie in *Suicide* was an important contribution to our understanding of **human nature**. He pointed out that the behaviour of most animals is very largely instinctive. Their biology determines and sets limits on their needs; when a pig has satisfied its appetite it stops consuming. It also arranges their co-ordination; bees instinctively obey the signals contained in the secretions of their fellow bees. Humans lack such instinctive constraints. Accordingly, however much they have or acquire, they can always wish for more. The person who finally gains the much-desired car can soon wish for a better one or for two cars. Hence we are potentially always threatened by constant yearning and unhappiness at not attaining our constantly inflated ambitions. Society performs for humans the task that instinct performs for other animals. Culture establishes the expectations into which we are socialised. In a stable society people internalise social rules or norms about appropriate desires and aspirations that roughly fit their circumstances. To put it crudely, as people can never be made content by giving them what they want (because they will always want more), they are instead made content by being persuaded that what they have is what they deserve. This balance of culturally-produced aspirations and circumstances, can be disrupted by sudden social, political or economic change. We might expect suicide rates to go up in times of economic depression: poverty makes people unhappy. But Durkheim argues that they also rise in times of economic boom. When people find that their circumstances allow

them to exceed the aspirations to which they have been socialised, they lose that cultural strait-jacket of norms and find themselves psychologically adrift. They suffer a condition of anomie.

The evidence Durkheim used in *Suicide* would now be regarded with some considerable scepticism, but his account of anomic suicide is intuitively plausible and important for understanding the way in which society may shape the individual. Radicals sometimes chide Durkheim for the conservative implications of anomie: if personal stability rests on stable norms, then order itself becomes virtuous, almost irrespective of the specific contours of that order.

Robert K. **Merton** fitted Durkheim's notion into a general theory of deviance. In the classic essay 'Social Structure and Anomie', Merton (1938) argued that, while the primary effect of social structures and cultures is to encourage conformity, the disjuncture between the two spheres may inadvertently create encourage deviance. The culture of the USA encourages all Americans to desire (and believe they deserve) the same goals: upward mobility and wealth. It also establishes norms regulating how those goals should be pursued: with hard work and educational attainment. But the social structure clearly distributes the means to achieve those goals unevenly. Hard work and striving at school would earn the typical black citizen far less than the typical white citizen. That opportunities are very far from equally distributed will lead many people to feel relatively deprived and hence justified in abandoning their commitment to striving only by the legitimate means. That they feel cheated causes people to give up faith in the rules (hence anomie).

Merton imaginatively expands this observation about the social structural encouragement to crime into a typology of deviant behaviour. The conformists have access to the approved goals and the legitimate means. Innovators remain positive about goals but negative about legitimate means: thieves

for example want the same things as everyone else but follow unacceptable routes to achieving them. Retreatists reject both the goals and the means: serious drug-takers and alcoholics would be examples. Ritualists have given up on the goals but remain strongly committed to the legitimate means: an example is the bureaucrat who regards rule-following as the end in itself. Merton's final category consists of rebels; people who reject some elements of both the goals and the means and substitute goals and means of their own.

Not surprising for something so ambitious, Merton's essay has been widely criticised. Placing such emphasis on the social structure leaves white-collar innovation unexplained; why should people who have full access to the legitimate means for getting on still cheat? More generally, it assumes that, prior to disappointment at being cheated by the social structure creating anomie, the default position was conformity. Nonetheless it is still profoundly influential, particularly on studies of subcultures and delinquency.

APARTHEID   An Afrikaans term for separation (as in 'apart'), this denotes the policy to segregate people by race pursued by the South African government between 1948–94. The policy involved an elaborate classification of race, rules to discourage the integration of races (especially inter-marriage) and a discriminatory allocation of rights. Race discrimination is a common feature of many societies and until the 1960s many US states had a variety of race laws but the South African example is one of the few where a state attempted to maintain an all-encompassing structure of racial discrimination.

See **civil rights movement** (US).

ASCETICISM   All the major world religions have wings inspired by the notion that physical pleasures and comfort should be denied in order to purify or improve the soul. The distinction between other-worldly asceticism (in a monastery or convent, for example) and this-worldly asceticism (adopting an attitude of monastic discipline while still living and working in the normal world) is central to Max **Weber**'s explanation of the rise of capitalism.

See **Protestant Ethic thesis**.

ASCRIBED STATUS   See **status**.

ASCRIPTION   In general usage, to ascribe is to give, impute or attribute certain features to some object, person, event or act without justification. In the absence of good evidence, to assert 'all politicians are corrupt' is to ascribe a characteristic to a class of people. The implied contrast is with discovery. Instead of finding out what politicians are really like, the observer has given them a certain quality. This sense of something given or undeserved is carried over into the modern social science pairing of ascription with achievement. High social position may be ascribed or achieved. In feudal society rank is usually inherited; in modern societies it is often achieved by individual effort and merit.

ASIATIC MODE OF PRODUCTION   This notion was originally proposed by Karl **Marx** and Friedrich **Engels** to explain the relative backwardness of oriental societies such as China and Egypt and developed by Karl Wittfogel, a member of the **Frankfurt School**, in his *Oriental Despotism* (1957): Asiatic economies were supposed characterised by an absence of private property, state control over public works (in particular irrigation systems; hence the related description 'hydraulic societies'), a self-sufficient village economy, an absence of autonomous cities and simplicity of production methods.

Without private property there could be no class struggle between the landowners and peasants; hence stagnation. While class struggle occurs naturally in the West it arises in the East only because colonialism brings capitalist exploitation.

Detailed research has failed to support the idea that a range of Asian societies had a common economic structure; the belief that they had owed more to western ignorance and stereotyping than to accurate comparative study. The idea fits awkwardly with Marxist thinking because it describes a quarter of the world as an exception to what Marxists otherwise claim is a universal model of progressive evolution through class conflict. Equally suspect, it makes colonialism a good thing and makes Asians at least partly responsible for their own backwardness.

The notion has now been largely abandoned. The consensus among left-wing scholars is that the backwardness of the East has very little to do with any intrinsic properties of those societies and is largely to be explained by western exploitation.

See **dependency theory**, **orientalism**.

ASSIMILATION   See accommodation.

ATTITUDE   Given the difficulty in knowing in detail the actions of people in society, sociologists have often had to content themselves with investigating people's attitudes. A great deal of sociology has been concerned with studying changes in attitudes and with mapping the way that attitudes vary with gender, class, education and so on. However, this whole endeavour assumes that attitudes denote a relatively stable system of beliefs concerning some object, that result in an evaluation of that object. Thus when we talk of an 'attitude to abortion' we suppose that people know what abortion is, that they approve or disapprove, and that they are not

whimsical. In any particular instance, all three assumptions may be contested. By inserting questions about made-up issues into an otherwise normal battery of questions, survey researchers have demonstrated that people will not only claim to know about a fictitious item of proposed legislation but will also declare themselves strongly in favour or against it. However, there is plenty of survey evidence that people do have relatively stable attitudes towards many aspects of their worlds and that these attitudes vary with shared characteristics such as education and social class.

ATTITUDE SCALE   Although more important in psychology, where it is common to look for personality characteristics that are relatively free of context (such as dogmatism or authoritarianism), attitude scales are used in many fields of social research. Questions are designed to assess not just whether someone is pro- or anti-something but how strongly they feel in either direction. Sophisticated statistical methods are now used to assess the extent to which responses to attitude scales form single clusters.

See **scale**.

AUTARCHY   The meaning would be clearer if it were 'auto-archy' because it signifies 'self' rule in the sense of absolute sovereignty or despotism: a type of regime in which the ruler is not constrained by any 'other'.

AUTHORITARIAN PERSONALITY   In 1950, Else Frenkel-Brunswick, Daniel J. Levinson, Theodor **Adorno** and R. Nevitt Sandford published *The Authoritarian Personality*, which popularised the idea that certain people, by virtue of their upbringing, acquired a character that predisposed them to accepting anti-democratic political beliefs. Rigid

discipline and conditional affection created a personality that found comfort in submission to authority while directing aggression towards outsiders, usually racial minorities. The notion was initially extremely influential because it seemed to explain the anti-Semitism and **fascism** of the previous two decades and because it accepted the popular assumption that how one was raised as a child was profoundly important. It fell out of favour with sociologists and political scientists because, although intuitively plausible, there was little evidence for the existence of a distinctly authoritarian personality type. The evidence that a distinct personality made people receptive to political ideas fitted equally well even if one reversed the causal connection; it was equally possible that being socialised into an authoritarian political culture shaped people's personalities.

See **open and closed mind**.

AUTHORITY If people obey a command because they fear the consequences of refusing, they are responding to power. If they obey because they believe they should, they are responding to authority. Authority is that sub-type of power that is accepted as legitimate. Max **Weber** distinguished three different types of authority. Traditional authority involves an appeal to custom and ancient practice. Legal-rational authority involves obedience to formal rules, which have been established by proper procedure: civil servants who distribute passports according to the regulations of a bureaucratic organisation can invoke this sort of authority for their actions with charismatic authority, the charismatic leader is obeyed because followers believe he or she possesses an extraordinary character (usually derived from a special relationship with the divine) that trumps existing rules or prevalent customs. An exemplar is the Christ figure in the New Testament who presents his radically innovative teachings in the form 'It is written … but I say to you …'

and justifies his rejection of the tradition only with the claim to be the Son of God.

Very loosely we can understand much about the differences between pre-modern and modern societies by noting that traditional authority is prevalent in the former and legal-rational authority (especially as embodied in bureaucratic organisations) dominates the latter. Charismatic authority may periodically appear in all sorts of societies but it is less common in modern societies.

AUTOMATION A simple way of understanding the evolution of work is to see it as the gradual replacement of animal power by inanimate power and control. Prehistoric people used only their own strength. Early modern people used their own strength and that of domesticated animals, augmented by such simple machines as the inclined plane and the block and tackle. Modern buildings are erected by people operating machines powered by fossil fuels. Automation marks that stage of technological advance in which work is performed primarily by machines that are only remotely controlled by people. Truly automatic processes are closed systems, which require no human intervention once the machines that perform the work have been designed and assembled. The invention of the silicon chip computer has greatly enhanced our capacity to automate not just the manufacture of goods but also the processing of people.

Sociologists are interested in the effect that automation has on the workers directly involved and on society more generally. In his classic *Alienation and Freedom* (1964), Robert Blauner argued that automation would return to workers much of the job satisfaction that earlier stages of mechanisation had removed. A counter argument is that automation makes work less intrinsically satisfying by reducing the levels of skill and discretion needed to perform tasks (see **de-skilling**). For example, developing photographic images used to be a highly skilled craft; now it can be done by a

machine that needs very little skill to operate. Harry **Braverman** argued that while the disappearance of unskilled manual work and the corresponding growth in the number of white-collar workers might superficially seem progressive, the change was actually the reverse: while-collar workers were becoming proleterianised.

The effects of automation are difficult to assess conclusively because we need to balance the effects of changes to particular jobs with an acknowledgement that new jobs are created. The job of developing photographs may have been de-skilled but this has only been possible because new and highly skilled jobs have been created in the design of the machines that have taken over the craft. That is, a high technology economy, while making routine what were previously complex tasks, creates new work in the design and maintenance of the technology.

AUTOPOIESIS   This ungainly neologism has been borrowed from biology and systems theory, where it refers to the idea that systems may be self-producing. The orderliness of biological cells, for example, is primarily generated by the operation of the cells themselves, not by external factors. Certain computer programs can also be written so as to create self-organising environments. Recently, sociologists have adopted this language as a way of trying to capture how it is that societies generate their own orderliness. At present, this seems to be merely the latest in a long line of borrowings from the life sciences and most uses of the term, including those by Niklas **Luhmann**, seem to be metaphorical rather than literal.

AVERAGE   See **measures of central tendency**.