Back for the Future: Sociological Theory and Today’s Big Issues

This book introduces the big hitting founders of sociology and social theory by framing their work in the context of today’s big ideas and issues like happiness, rationality, cognitive bias and decision psychology, the internet and its social power, economic organisation and capitalism, bureaucracy, power, pop-culture and management. The reader will get an introduction to sociology; the ideas that founded and grounded ‘society’ through Durkheim, Marx and Weber; many curiosity pieces and data on some of today’s big issues; plus some historical references that informed early, systematic social enquiry.

About this book

How do we understand social relations and the organisation of society? Answering this question has a lineage of insights and theories stretching back to the founding theorists of sociology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. The test of this series of chapters was to see how far their ideas felt relevant to today’s society and the issues we face. The reader is the best judge of this but the writer found revisiting these stellar writers refreshing and insightful. These chapters introduce the writers, their ideas and the context of their time plus references are made to many other sociological ideas, themes and terms. So this series is a refreshing read with new insights and interpretations for both the seasoned scholar and the reader wanting an introductory text to sociology. Several sections support the related disciplines of social psychology, anthropology, economics and management. This book is primarily making social theory real whatever your interests or studies in ‘society’ are.

The Book begins with a few pages introducing the idea of sociological thinking. The book is designed to be read either in normal sequence or in chapters and bite-sized chunks, so the
reader can dip in wherever they fancy. The structure of the three main chapters (2, 3 and 4) is as follows:

* Introduction to the ideas of the classical theorists
* Description of the context and some historical insight into the time and place
* Several of today’s issues are described and discussed with various illustrations, data, references and debate
* Comment on what the classical theorist would say about today’s big issues

Big topics such as the origins of capitalism, the world happiness debate and the power of the internet are given critical treatments from different perspectives. Plus the reader gets a look at some lighter topics like the power of pop music and even a little fun puzzle to do - the relevance of which will become clear. Several texts are referred to throughout the book and listed in the endnotes which I recommend you to read. The views expressed and described in this book are not necessarily the author’s views.
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1) What’s the point of sociology and who does it?

“Sociology is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects”

Sociology tells us what society is like and how it works. The above quote suggests that sociology is a science as was the views of one of its founders Max Weber. It is partly a science studying the conscious, agency-orientated human being in relation to his or her fellow human being, social world and environment. It seeks to understand meaning through systematic analysis. Sociology is not the same as the more ‘knowable’ phenomena of the natural sciences such as biology or physics as it is concerned with people, their actions and their habits. People are guided by social norms, structures and values at every level, every day - from the micro-level of everyday interaction at work, leisure or home through to the macro-level of complex social institutions and systems such as the internet, marriage, the workplace or international trade. Sociological enquiry enables us to uncover how social exchange and behaviour operates and why and how social relationships change over time.

Intentional social observation and study is, today, frequently done by people who are not academics in Universities and often not called sociologists. Health workers, teachers, governments, researchers and marketers in business ‘do’ sociology. They are using sociology when they systematically evaluating society and its constituent parts. Unlike a professional sociologist they may attempt to influence macro and micro-level behaviour, change or policy. For instance advertisers and media-companies assess how people culturally influence one another and therefore why
we might make certain purchases. A second example might be teachers and educationalists where they are forming and reforming the education system and experience. Their influence upon human socialisation is significant, as social norms are learned through the profound life-course event of the school years. Public sociology, critical (theoretical) sociology, professional sociology and policy sociology involve many people exploring and explaining social action. In recent times ‘public sociology’ - discourse with many ‘publics’ in group conversation about the future of society - has become a more broadly deployed approach to social theory and action. Publics here are, for instance, patients and clients of service providers, specific customer groups and the general public.

In all its forms sociology’s systematic analysis and synthesis of social systems, institutions and relations, and of what it is to be human with other humans, gives the subject a separate and unique purpose. Sociology is not about what we are (biology or chemistry) or what makes us tick (psychology) or how we organise our material affairs (economics). It is about how we collectively organise, influence, learn, control, coerce, converge or diverge and how social institutions emerge, sustain or change. Incorrectly sociology has been tarnished with a reputation for telling us what is good for us. In fact the social science tells us how things are and why things are as they are. The question of how things should be or what needs to be done is a matter for a separate process of political and moral discourse. So if you are trying to figure out, as a for instance, what makes one society or social group happier than another; how organisations function; or why caring staff can be running an uncaring hospital sociological enquiry helps figure out the answers.

The chapters ahead do two things. Firstly the three founding figures in sociology are introduced, their work is described and the context of the time is explained with some historical reference
points and events. Secondly some key current topics, issues and social phenomena are discussed such as organisation and management, behavioural psychology, the happiness debate and the sociology of the internet to name but a few. Each chapter maps current issues with the founding principles and insights of the three writers. These chapters are introductory pieces on some colossus writers and they give a flavour of some of their ideas. These chapters also have some interesting insights and topic discussions for the experienced scholar. We start with Emile Durkheim introduced with an illustration of his theory of two different types of societal solidarity.
2) Durkheim – The Collective Phenomenon Discovered

“...the beast among us is a poor approximation of the highly socialised beings who constitute societies”

Introduction:

This Durkheim quote introduces the idea that it is through socialisation and the repeated and varied exposure of individuals to social norms, values, signals and behaviours that civilised beings are formed who function fully in the world.

This chapter takes the reader through the torrid, historical antecedents to Durkheim’s ‘invention’ of comparative sociology; the identification of anomie and solidarity; and his development of ideas on power and society. The chapter has separate features on modern social issues – the internet; sexual politics; the happiness debate; and even the power of pop-music – with some footnotes on what Durkheim might have said about some of these matters.

The Context:

It is late 19th century and turn of the 20th century France. There are major social upheavals and consequences to industrialisation. The population has risen steadily and a new partly urbanised and poor social class has grown in number. France is recovering from war and the country has rising suicide rates. The nation is shaken by financial and political scandal - the financial scandal of the century in the shape of the Panama Scandals - and the political scandal of the century with the much publicised Dreyfus Affair (see the box below).

Durkheim’s mission was to put his academic insight to the task of understanding and conquering an apparent moral crisis. The circular metaphysical ponderings of philosophy; the gloomy inward journey of psychoanalysis; and the limits of economics
spurred Durkheim into a different disciplinary approach. He was to uncover and systematically explain the power of social forces in shaping society - for good or ill.

The Ideas:

Emile Durkheim took sociology into a disciplinary method all of its own. He observed the individualist weakness of the psychology discipline and the circulatory twists and turns of philosophy. Instead he wanted to deploy a different method; a social physics\(^6\) approach in order to understand the nature and dynamics of society. He was one of the first to systematically show how social forces overcome individual action (or agency), and that these forces direct, coerce, contain, control and socialise the individual.

The power of *social forces* may seem pretty obvious today but not necessarily so in the late 19\(^{th}\) century. Religiously-driven moral coda drove the social sphere. They maintained a continuity of moral life and provided a check on the rules of social behaviour with often stifling social codes of conduct. Alongside this engineering and science drove the industrial and economic sphere. The doctrine of *positivism* was enthusiastically applied to the social world by Durkheim via Auguste Comte. He developed the notion of a *science of society*. 
The Big Scandals at the turn of 20th century France:

The *Panama Scandals* involved government ministers and members taking payments to hide the losses of the Panama Canal Company. Close to 1 billion francs were lost, and this was thought to be the largest financial scandal of the 19th century. In 1889 the company was wound up after several years of cover ups and bribes that kept the scale of losses secret. Some 800,000 French citizens sustained losses in the debacle and France was rocked politically and economically by the political scandal and the enormous bankruptcy.

The *Dreyfus affair* was a much celebrated, long running and complex legal and political affair. Captain Richard Dreyfus was imprisoned for leaking military secrets to the German embassy in Paris. He was imprisoned for life and military leaders suppressed evidence regarding the real culprit. The affair was a long running public battle between the anti-Dreyfus and pro-Dreyfus camps and it divided France. It was well known due to the dramatic trial for treason of the author Emile Zola following his equally famous article revealing the affair entitled *J’Accuse* in the *L’Aurore* newspaper. The affair has been much studied for its complex twists and turns as regards cover-up, ethical behaviour, anti-semitism, freedom of expression, and what was probably one of the first cases of what we now call *whistle-blowing*. Zola was convicted for libel and fled briefly to England to avoid imprisonment. Dreyfus was eventually pardoned in 1906 after the affair had run and run since 1894. Sadly Monsieur Zola did not live to see the event as he died in a freak accident in 1902.
Durkheim owed an intellectual debt to his fellow Frenchman Comte’s positivist doctrine half a century before. It enabled him to develop, as he put it the science of society and social physics further. Comte and Durkheim asserted the view that science and rationality can deploy observation, experiment and comparison to social life, as science does to natural phenomenon. The social world and social phenomena can be observed to be organised and dynamic. Social life, in its broadest sense, can even be actually, practically and intentionally organised in such a way that maximises social cohesion and combats the threat of inequality brought about by industrialisation. This was Comte’s ontology or world-view as it was Durkheim’s. Durkheim thought that social life functions through the continuing operation of a complex system that is rather machine like. The parts of the system work together to produce stability. This functionalist approach says that the job of sociology is to study the relationships between different parts of the social system that enable society to function. Together different sub-systems enable the main system to work as a whole.

This organic, body-system metaphor is just as seductive today as it was then. These systems theories and metaphors are prevalent in everything from maths and biology to business and healthcare. This is partly because the idea of functional ‘systems’ gives us the comforting idea of fixity and predictability rather than the more unsettling states of contingency and randomness. Also seductive is the idea of mapping or reproducing in social life the certain knowledge, continuity and reliability that define complex systems such as the planet, the human/mammalian body, a plant or evolutionary reproduction. Research and study on the ‘real-world’ issues of the time – on religion, the division of labour and suicide as examples – honed the sociological approach of Durkheim and presented to him the notion of social facts. These are rules of action and institutions that constrain or channel human behaviour like the family, organised religion or marriage.
He was concerned with the things that bind society together - *social solidarity*. Solidarity is still a powerful and specific concept in French culture today, and has influence in many other cultures too.

In recent times the solidarity idea was the eponym for *Solidarność* - the solidarity movement in Poland in the 1980s. The movement inspired and re-ordered social movements that, in turn, achieved evolutionary and largely peaceful change in the political order across Eastern Europe. Starting in the ship yards of Gdańsk, ‘Solidarity’ led a workers movement that re-configured the political order. Its character was inclusive, collective and built on a sense of solidarity between people and groups well beyond only workerist interests. These values and interests were not reflected in the makeup, behaviour and ideas of the political class of the day.

Solidarity as a concept conjures up the idea of consensus and social cohesion in rough times and periods of great social change. The term does not fully translate into English but ‘a state where social bonds and interdependency hold people together’ will do. In Durkheim’s time rapid and deep-seated change in
people’s living and working lives were taking place due to industrial revolution and the establishment of a post-agrarian model of societal organisation. The solidarity idea was further conceptualised between the mechanical and the organic.

**Mechanical solidarity** describes a pre-industrialised, pastoral, agrarian society. Most people do the same things and live in close proximity. They have the same values and influences and believe the same things. Distinctions between work, family, kinship and society are blurred and distinctly over-lapping if not non-existent. Moral rules are firm and rarely transgressed; collective consciousness is concrete; and law is repressive in response to the rarity and shock of any transgression.

**Organic solidarity**, by contrast, involves people doing different things from one another to earn a living – i.e. a high division of labour. Work becomes more separate from the rest of life. People are dependent upon one another for goods and services as, individually, they are producing one small link in the chain. Durkheim was taken with the seemingly paradoxical idea that in a more diverse society people could become more solidified due to their many inter-dependencies; people in the modern age drawn together because of differences rather than their sameness. Many of these interdependencies were not necessarily very visible or part of the daily lived experience. To Durkheim, as well as to many other observers at the time, the pivotal problem was: would society hold together?

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries industrialisation brought with it a profound re-patterning of how people lived, worked, met, married and conducted their lives. Durkheim was optimistic about the stronger bonds of inter-dependence and collective purpose and the extent to which society could hold together. This sociology rings out to today’s problems of how society holds together in the face of an ideological *individualism*
that is today pre-eminently celebrated and encouraged as the model of all human action.

Rapid societal change however brings with it the risk of *Anomie* - the opposite of solidarity. Durkheim conceptualised anomie as a state of normlessness where social norms that bind people together become weaker, or at the very least weaker for some. Common bonds, when strained or cut, leave the individual at sea and confused, for instance in the cases of divorce, extreme debt or a move away from localised roots and familiarity. These were all acute concerns of the early modern period. Social isolation leaves the egoistic individual less able to function and benefit from the mutual exchange of ideas, resources, love or care. At the ‘anomied’ extreme is the risk of the mortal sin - as it was seen at the time - and monstrous taboo of suicide.

*Suicide* was a ground-breaking study in 1897. This was not only because it revealed the social influences and differences in society as regards people who were more likely or less likely to take their own lives. Even more it broke ground because it revealed, through systematic research, the *social influences* aside from psychological influences upon human action. In the case of *Suicide* socially constructed differences and similarities were revealed through studying the specifics of suicide rates and the contextual circumstances of different social groups. The study unearthed more suicides amongst men than women; more amongst the wealthy than the poor; more amongst single people than married people; and more amongst Protestants than Catholics. In the last half of the 19th century the plight of the urban poor, fears about social fractures and desperate poverty in cities concerned artists, thinkers, industrialists and politicians as the painting below from the celebrated George Watts depicts.

1850 to 1900 saw a process of unprecedented economic and social change. Watts’ painting at the beginning of this period illustrates a casualty of change that later Durkheim explained.
Found Drowned depicted the horror of an unexplained death on a huge canvas by the very popular painter George Watts. The plight of poverty and socially failing cities exercised the minds of artists and politicians as well as academics like Durkheim. In this case Watts bravely broke some artistic conventions and taboos of the times by depicting desperate isolation and poverty on three huge canvasses of which this is one. It is, in turns, beautiful, disturbing and curious and it includes the mysterious motif of the gold chain in the woman’s left hand. The work can be seen in the Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey, UK.
Durkheim’s comparative studies for *Suicide* concluded that people who were more socially integrated were less likely to commit suicide. This was in part due to their conduct being more socially regulated. Such forces of social regulation, integration and solidarity affected and directed many other areas of human action. Durkheim was uncovering the social forces and ‘social physics’ as they were called that prompt action and inaction in people; that is action and inaction above and beyond choices driven by personal cognition, motivation or what we now understand as personal well-being and mental health (then mental ill-health was described as, madness, hysteria or lunacy).

Durkheim also studied religion and its social process and was one of the first to do so in a systematic and rigorous way from a social science rather than theological viewpoint. He concluded that religion was society worshipping itself – the ‘collective effervescence’ of society celebrating its congruity and functionality. Belief and value was vested in the symbols, rites, rituals and totems of religion. These brought about social order through normative adherence to rules and norms. Organised religion consistently reminded people of these social norms. Durkheim was not making any agnostic or atheistic point but instead allowing us to view the latent social purpose of institutions above and beyond their stated, intended or immediately obvious purpose. Here Durkheim observed organised religion as the most important institution for organising, proselytising and maintaining social norms over and above religion’s manifest spiritual function.

*Social ‘facts’ –*

For instance Durkheim observed crime and deviance as ‘social facts’. Crime and deviance he saw as not only inevitable outcomes of social agency but necessary to societal functioning. At the time people in society were becoming less constrained and limited by traditional convention than were their forbears or at least some were. Social taboos and conduct boundaries were
being challenged and broken such as in personal and sexual freedoms or moral behaviour, and in patriarchal honour as the *Dreyfus scandal* in the box above demonstrates. Deviance fulfils two important functions. Firstly it has an *adaptive* function it introduces new behaviours, challenges or goals into society. These may be challenged in the first instance and will provoke challenge and re-assertion of social rights and wrongs. Over time however some deviant behaviour can become normalised. Secondly, deviance paradoxically facilitates *boundary maintenance* between good and bad behaviours. Transgressing the boundaries of right and wrong can have a solidifying effect upon the commitment of the ‘moral majority’ to clarify social norms and what determine what constitutes legitimate and desirable behaviour. If you like we understand the universality of what is ‘good’ and ‘right’ in part through the exceptionalism of what is ‘bad’. The challenge to deviance can enable conduct boundaries to re-assert themselves or re-form. A recent example of this is several countries instituting zero tolerance of certain behaviours and raising the bar of anti-social behaviour as well as containing or criminalising it. In the historical moment deviance solidifies the good and the desirable and, over time, the construction of what are social ‘goods’ change and evolve.

Durkheim’s paradigm-making social studies and identification of a concept of social facts and dynamic social life was influential and long lasting creating a *functionalist* school of thought in sociology. Functionalist theory sees social institutions in terms of the functions that they perform and the contribution that they make to the continuity and stability of society. Functionalism also suggests that social life transcends the life of the individual; social life ‘operates’ at a separate level to the individual whilst not necessarily negating the agency and transformative power of the individual. Such Durkheim’s work tended towards identifying the things that drew society together and the constraints placed upon individual agency rather than the constituency of what might divide or create disharmony. His
work has been criticised for implying an innate and purposive character to society as if was a specific phenomenon, ‘thing-like’ with its own needs.
Today’s issues

1) Does Happiness Matter?

“In money can’t buy happiness, but it can buy a lot of cool stuff to distract you from noticing how unhappy you are.”

In all probability every culture, in every time and every place would identify happiness as important to human life and asserting happiness as the most important thing. This seems like an obvious, common-sense statement. However where can we see happiness and well-being aspirations targeted in social policy or in the organisation of economic, social and geo-political systems? Money and material comforts make a difference to happiness but they are not the whole story. Happiness and well-being goals are seen by many as better metrics than conventional economic measurements that are so frequently used as the proxy measures for happiness, social good and progress. Economic measurement has a continuing decline in ‘meaning’. Economic measures such as GDP or GNP provide less and less reliability or validity as measures of worth, materiality, progress or ‘goodness’. The early 21st century has been marked already by a
banking crisis, the Great Recessions, collapsing economies in Greece, Spain, Ireland and large chunks of the middle-east, stagnant economic productivity in the USA and the UK and the future being heavily mortgaged with exorbitant national debt.

Excessive consumption with its itinerant natural resource depletion and waste production are building up a planetary crisis. Governments in the rich world are more and more concerned with fiscal tightening and austerity and therefore even more possessed by economic measurement as the measure of whether or not ‘progress’ is being achieved. These factors continue to provoke cries of a crisis in capitalism. At the same time many relatively wealthy countries are not necessarily proving to be happier ones. Measurement of happiness and well-being includes innovative work led by the Earth Institute and the academic leadership of Jeffrey Sachs and Richard Layard. Here are some highlights from their first Global Happiness survey commissioned by the UN.

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<th>The Seven Causes of Happiness¹⁶:</th>
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<td>1. Income</td>
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<td>2. Work</td>
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<td>3. Family (and close relationships)</td>
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<td>4. Community and Friends</td>
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What makes people across the world happy?  

- Political freedom, strong social networks and an absence of corruption are together more important than income in explaining well-being differences between the top and bottom countries.

- Happier countries tend to be richer countries. But more important for happiness than income are social factors like the strength of social support, the absence of corruption and the degree of personal freedom.

- Over time as living standards have risen, happiness has increased in some countries, but not in others (like for example, the United States). On average, the world has become a little happier in the last 30 years (by 0.14 times the standard deviation of happiness around the world).

- Unemployment causes as much unhappiness as bereavement or separation. At work, job security and good relationships do more for job satisfaction than high pay and convenient hours.

- Behaving well makes people happier.

- Mental health is the biggest single factor affecting happiness in any country. Yet only a quarter of mentally ill people get treatment for their condition in advanced countries and fewer in poorer countries.

- Stable family life and enduring marriages are important for the happiness of parents and children.
• In advanced countries, women are happier than men, while the position in poorer countries is mixed.

• At the individual level, good mental and physical health, someone to count on, job security and stable families are crucial.

So who are the happiest nations?

Northern Europeans are the happiest in the world whilst the countries of the sub-Saharan countries are the least happy\(^{18}\). Denmark tops the list of the happiest closely followed by Norway, Finland and the Netherlands.

A few happiness results from the UK:

In the UK 25% of the population give a low rating for “life satisfaction”\(^{19}\) whilst 21% report high anxiety levels. Health, employment status and relationship status were the items that caused most well-being as well as their lack causing the most unhappiness.

More parents were satisfied with their social lives than were non-parents. Unemployed people were twice as unhappy as people in work and middle aged people - aged 45 to 55 - were less satisfied than young people and retired people. Over the period 2007 to 2011 happiness ratings were broadly stable.

Much as the observer might want to believe that material well-being is the only cause of happiness this data does not bear this out. For instance middle age is the time when respondents are
least happy yet the time when they are, in richer countries at least, relatively better off materially.

**Durkheim’s view**

A Durkheimian or *early functionalist* approach to the problem of happiness levels not corresponding to increased material comforts would seek to investigate potential causes at the collective level. For instance what is the trajectory of the happier groups of people in the happier countries? How does, for instance, personal freedom, strong social support or the conduct of working life facilitate happiness? Durkheim would investigate the nature of social integration and disintegration too and the structural differences and similarities between the less happy and happy societies or social groups. He would, no doubt, observe some fracturing of social solidarity. On the positive side he would be amazed at the extent to which governments can affect social policy - for good or for ill - in ways un-imaginable in his time.
2) The Internet and Globalism .... a ‘Glocalised Solidarity’

A profound social change of the late 20th century was the innovation of the microchip sparking the start of the ‘information age’. This was closely followed by the invention of the internet. Though much has been written about the technological and economic impact of the internet, its affect upon social discourse has been even more profound. The internet has, in a matter of two decades, changed how we learn, communicate, work, play and socialise. It may or may not be changing all the deeper fundamentals of social processes, but the nature of how we experience access to media, time, space, privacy and proximity is altered as the conduct of so much communication and exchange is done via the internet. Social media is both global, extending reach in almost every conceivable form, as well as local, enabling fast hyper-local communication. Hence the terms ‘glocalisation’ and ‘thinking globally and acting locally’ have been coined.

A functionalist approach to the internet such as Emile Durkheim’s would identify its function in bringing together and solidifying relationships and social institutions. For instance family and kinship can be maintained in more diverse ways; communities can be spawned that are highly functional and specific; consensus can be built through better communications; human activity and ingenuity can be mobilised across boundaries; and the process of human decision making and exchange can be made more transparent and thus ‘functional’. Probably Durkheim would love the internet and its potential for continuity and solidarity across what were previously insurmountable boundaries of place and space. There is, of course, a downside to this rosy view and the potentially extreme anomie and isolation of the lonely and dependent user.

Here are some of the changes that the cyber world is making. Following the illustration is a discussion.
The Change Territories of the Internet:

- **Identity**: more variable
- **Efficiency**: faster transaction, better reach
- **Privacy**: some losses, some gains
- **Trust**: transparent and selective medium
- **Proximity**: space neutral
- **Reality**: of a different kind
- **Community**: creating more
- **Democracy**: naturally equalising
These eight areas are all ones where the internet has made a difference and provoked change. Before reading on it would be interesting for the reader to score these areas and gauge where they think the internet has made most change, and which changes were for the better or worse in their view.

The change territories:

- **Identity:** Cyberspace enables any individual or group of individuals to create whatever identity they like as ‘netiquette’ reduces the usual day-to-day sensory and inter-personal checking devices of the ‘real’ world. One person or group can become many; identity can be kept secret or mysterious; avatars can be created and are, in fact, essential in many internet-driven communities such as the gaming world.

- **Efficiency:** Communication and transaction is instant and reach can be to many millions or to one. A tweet from the Pope or Beyonce will be seen instantly by millions. *Digital natives* - younger people who have been brought up entirely with digital media - know no different to this medium of communication. They won’t be familiar with the costly process of paper driven, localised and closed systems of communication (costly in time and money and use of resources). Price-efficiencies have been provoked by the growing penetration of digital access. This growth coincided with and sustained substantial price stabilisations and price reductions in many goods markets. Many retailers have been put out of business due to the price competition facilitated by web-marketing whilst the consumer has benefitted from many sustained price reductions. Related to efficiency is the instantaneity of cyber world with communications taking no noticeable time to be received. In an instant anyone and everyone receives postings which brings with it plusses and minuses. Emotional reaction is instant such as the brutal twitter storm against campaigners in favour of a woman
becoming the face on the five-pound note in the UK or the instant criminality of the summer riots of 2011.

- **Privacy:** Achieving privacy in the internet world is difficult if not impossible. The user does not necessarily own the data that they think they own. The act of making a Facebook post or Google search involves an awkward relationship with the digital provider where they own some or all of that data. It would seem that users have been prepared to surrender a degree of privacy and ownership in return for the free access to globalised social networks. Also the rules and mores of the web – the netiquette – can discourage privacy and push the limits of transparency to a level that is intolerable for some. Internet-driven social networks encourage people to play out the events of their lives or the day-to-day rhythms to anyone and everyone. This is a way of being in the social world quite unprecedented in previous social institutions. As users share more of each other’s data so the boundaries of what constitutes private, specific and particular become eroded. The big players who run the internet have a dismissive if not rather authoritarian approach to the privacy issue:

> “If you have something that you don’t want to know, maybe you should not be doing it in the first place”
> 
> *Eric Schmidt, CEO Google 2009*

- **Trust:** Here the internet appears to be paradoxical. On the one hand the mysteries of identity, motive and presence on the net, coupled with no opportunity for assessing non-verbal person-to-person information would normally invoke a feeling of suspicion and distrust. Also bad behaviour, abuse, deceit, breach of trust, bad language etc. has far less consequence on the net where identity can be manufactured and ‘contact’ is not generally face-to-face. Yet people share
their innermost thoughts and personal details not least their bank account numbers! Users display highly trusting behaviours because the medium is transparent and selective. To further speed up the process of transparency user’s preferences and opinions are algorithmically sorted through on their behalf in micro-time. Furthermore the good-will of people giving on the net is extraordinary such as through sharing\(^2\), reviewing, offering advice and the giving of ‘net-time’ to others and so on all of which builds trust and confidence.

- **Proximity:** Contact and friendship is made possible across many of the confines of time and space. Your trusted colleague, gaming pal or best friend can be thousands of miles away. You can be *partially proximate* to local action anywhere in the world. Though distance does not facilitate direct contact the user can see, hear, learn and participate at any distance. With this comes the facility to ‘be with’ whoever you want to be with.

- **Reality:** Cyberspace is in some respects is a different reality perhaps so well established that what used to be described as ‘virtual reality’ is merely now an accepted, *extended reality* or additional reality.

- **Community:** The internet’s communities are less bounded by space, scale or lack of information than are other temporal communities. Therefore the ability to be selective and find, build or participate in a community is simple. Contact through emailing, social networking sites and mobile phone use has become more joined up thus quickly enabling highly specific communities of interest to form and re-form. For instance a conference becomes a network that begets an expert forum that forms many spin-off sub communities.
For example just such a process happened in professional caring for children with disabilities. The process of researching and refining the best methods of feeding for children with significant disabilities was carried out using Delphi Method\textsuperscript{23}. This facilitated the creation of an expert community and better solutions and innovation to the problem in hand. Without digital communication this world community would operate slowly, partially and occasionally that is if it could form and operate at all.
The E-petitioners

Campaigning and petitioning via the internet has become both popularised and institutionalised due to the naturally viral ability of the web. E-petitioning has become more popularised as more causes hit more inboxes and achieve more signatures than before. Also e-petitioning has become, in part at least, institutionalised as government have encouraged it to exercise a measure of influence over the policy agenda.

The UK parliament is committed to hold a debate should an e-petition reach 100,000 signatures. Some causes have managed to reach this threshold including:

- The Hillsborough campaign demanding release of cabinet papers that relate to the disaster
- The campaign against female genital mutilation
- A campaign to change rules regarding immigration from Bulgaria and Romania
- The War on Welfare campaign for a commitment to an evaluation of the cumulative impact of welfare cuts on the lives of disabled people
Democracy: The internet is democratic at many levels. It facilitates the transmission of any and every idea, event or point of view – its character is ‘any to the many’. Three of the fundamental ingredients to the net are that it is transparent, open and universally available. Without these systemic footings it just does not work. Transparency, openness and universality are democratic values too. Of course universality comes at a price of some entry cost to the user as net use is not entirely free. These values, in so far as you can attribute values to a system, coincide with democratic values. The open and broad nature of the internet has presented a threat to authority. China for instance has tried to restrict internet use and limit the contributions of particular bloggers yet has had to peel back many layers of restriction in the wake of populist demand. Participative democracy and activism had been boosted by the internet. For instance voting in participative public spending in Porto Allegre, Brazil or the growth in e-petitioning. These web-driven tools amplify issues and give weight to public voice that would otherwise be less possible to either facilitate or aggregate.

Different sociological syntheses have come to contrasting conclusions about the nature of the internet including a generalist ‘enrichment view’ and ‘isolationist view’.

The enrichment view, on balance, favours a positive and optimistic view of the internet. The cyber-world enriches social life, cultural participation, access to pretty much anything and it makes economic exchange more possible and more efficient. It is broadly speaking an adjunct to everyday life and does not replace the deeper meaning of face-to-face discourse or real life, therefore need not be viewed as a threat. The medium brings people together and its transparent, simple and universal characteristics foster openness, democracy and participation.
A rather more jaundiced view is that the internet is fundamentally isolating. The isolationist view suggests that and the net cultivates lonely digital dependence. Interaction is always done alone and an element of being alone cannot be removed from the implications of the experience. The lone person has also become dependent upon and incarcerated by the internet, or rather by the power dynamics of its use. For instance many employers expect employees to be available out of hours which, if not observed, can also create disadvantages for anyone who is not on call as they may miss out on essential information or events.

A further school of thought related to the digital dependence view sees the globalisation of the internet and concentrated digital ownership as having potentially more sinister characteristics. Ultimately we do not own our own data and the big four do. Google, Facebook, Apple and Microsoft do own most of the world’s digital data and the means of using it. They are powerful and wealthy as they have oligopolistic control over digital traffic. Humanity has as yet little experience of digital power, therefore what these internet giants will do with their unique power is up for debate and conjecture. They are also joined now by the enormous Alibaba that accounts for a huge proportion of East Asian digital traffic and is part owned by Yahoo.

In response to the huge financial outlays that have been made, the economically logical path points towards the monetisation of digital transactions. Without a change in the ownership configuration of digital data and the protection of privacy there is a risk of digital feudalism. The feudal analogy portrays powerful digital owners running the cyber-engines that drive the use of the web with users becoming the serfs that have to pay the owners a rate for use. Furthermore governments – at least some of the most powerful ones including the US – are reliant upon these few companies for access to data for surveillance purposes
and are seen by many as compromised in their regulation of the big four. This view on the current state of digital ownership and the power of ‘digital capital’ raises concerns about threats to freedom, digital agency, privacy and efficiency. Digital feudalism is a synthesis framed from very different viewpoints - the libertarians of the right, the entrepreneurial, open-source movement of business people, and the quasi-Marxian analysts from the left.
3) Sexual freedom, diversity, gender roles and the democratic ethic

Major changes in gender roles and liberated sexual identity have rapidly advanced relatively recent in human history. Only since the 1960s have women had the ability to control their reproductive function through the invention and mass use of the contraceptive pill. The availability and mass use of ‘the pill’ is surely one of the biggest social changes of the 20th century. With the advent of family planning came changes in the nature of how people made choices about their sexual partners as well as their lifestyle, life-course, family size and work patterns. This profound change in lifestyle and choices about life-course heralded great social changes and new-found freedoms.

Only since the early 1970s has the demography of the workplace changed such that most work and most occupations are shared between men and women. Female participation in work is at 67% whilst male participation is at 76%. The difference between the two is mainly due to women looking after children. Women in work rose in the 1970s and 1980s due to change in sexual and family choices as well as social pressure for equalities legislation (Equal Pay Act 1975; Sex Discrimination Act 1975). In 1971 53% of women were working with a higher proportion in low paid and part-time work. In the UK about a third of managers are women. There is much diversity in sexual relationships and identity practiced differently from country to country. For instance polygamy remains common in parts of Africa, Asia and to an extent was so amongst Mormons in Utah, USA. Gay and lesbian legal union is recognised in many European countries through civil partnership (such as Denmark and Spain); and the first gay marriages have taken place in the UK and some US states. South Africa protected the rights of minorities including gay and lesbian people in its post-apartheid constitution. Gender roles in child-rearing are long since not the exclusive role of women and ‘bread-winning’ not necessarily the primary role of
men especially in the West. Gender identity is not entirely clear cut with the meaning of gender challenged through gender re-assignment, and variable ways in which people define and display sexuality. Some men adopt conventionally feminised appearances or conduct, and some women adopt more conventionally masculine appearances or conduct patterns.

In a Durkheimian view of the world these behaviours and social mores once seen as deviant challenged the mainstream consensus and, over time, changed the nature of what is perceived as acceptable as regards gender roles, sexuality and conduct. Furthermore the democratic ethic requires certain freedoms to be protected however different and exceptional some conduct may be in comparison to the average or the norm. These democratic and liberal ethics again are recent shared mores in human history and not universal across the globe. Diversity has been cultivated as these ethics have changed the ways that societies organise the relationships between different behaviours and cultures with a premium placed upon freedoms and rights for all people.

4) Collective effervescence

Durkheim emphasised what he saw as a need for humanity to celebrate itself, for itself and with itself. This notion of ‘collective effervescence’ later formed part of the underpinning of latent functionalism in sociological theory. The ‘thing’ that people are assembling and acting in might not be the only function that the activity performs. Social action has manifest functions and latent functions. For instance the football game is the weekend or mid-week ritual that is not merely about a game called football. Most people who watch the game don’t play it. It enables mainly men to get together with one another and exist in a different world from their day-to-day. It enables social belonging to be
organised, ritualised and symbolised and for tribal loyalties to be acted out.

**Conclusions**

As a thinker, scholar and researcher Emile Durkheim began a process of de-constructing differences in social life using approaches and methods that remain important to understanding society today. His approach broke the boundaries of academic discipline and gave life to the rich and unique approach of *social theory*. His work began a long running debate about the extent to which social ‘structure’ exists separately and drives human agency and the extent to which human beings can act independently and of their own volition or agency.

This *structure/agency* debate was set for many decades as a dualist debate – one or other of the two forces seen as driving the other. In more recent times such a competitive, dualist debate has focussed also on the interplay between structure and action/agency rather than the separate characteristics of the two. It might be useful to think of societal structure and independent agency as a little like the Chinese *Taoist* yin and yang. Each phenomenon has traces of the other within it. Yin and yang are opposite yet complimentary. One force contains an element of the other or the suggestion of another. *Social structure* is formed and continued by the actions of many individuals. Habitual, everyday, predictable actions perpetuate social structures. From time to time social structures change as new conventions are patterned in and patterned out; rules and conventions can change and shift. *Individual action* is made using our free will as human beings. Yet how we deploy our free will – our actions – are significantly influenced by social structures. Individual action informs and solidifies social structure and vice versa; the two are co-constitutive as each forms and re-forms the other. The
social structures of, for instance, the family or international trade are both perpetuated and changed by constant individual actions and the wealth of socially structured knowledge that people possess.
A sociology-light moment: Pop Sociology! (or some sociology of pop)

“What will survive of us is love” Philip Larkin

Whilst we have been on the happiness topic, or sexual freedoms for that matter, let us look at the nature of joy and love in pop music. From the social revolution of the 1960s to the new Birth of the Cool of today love in various forms has remained at the centre of music.

One of the artworks for All You Need is Love, by The Beatles, 1967

Popular music is the most popular leisure activity in the world – pause on that claim for a moment. Music is popular as in: listening to it; buying it; dancing to it; dressing like it’s proponents; talking about it; and many holding pop artists and celebrities in the highest esteem. Pop music in the west is subtly
changing some of its subject matter. It is straying from its main diet of romantic love.

Because I’m happy
Clap along if you feel like a room without a roof
Because I’m happy
Clap along if you feel like happiness is the truth

“Happy” by Pharell Williams

It may be a debatable ruse to attribute song titles and lyrics to the state of contentment across the western world but it is interesting nonetheless. Pharell Williams’ monster sized hit is just about happiness and it dispenses with the usually compulsory attachment to romantic love, familial love or even confluent love. This is a rare departure from the normal pop music diet of love, loss or angst – or a mixture of these. So what’s in the pop lyric anyway? Does it tell us anything about the times we are in? The numbers at least tells us about a desire for a simple manifestation of joy and happiness that is expressive, energetic, accessible and fun.

What’s Love got to do with it?

This was a news headline discussing the changing themes of the most popular songs over 5 decades. The American Journal of Advertising Research compared the song titles of the 1960s with the words in the song titles of decades since. In modern times frequent references to ‘desperation’, ‘ambition’ and ‘pain’ were common in song titles; topics almost unheard of back in the 1960s. Past times pop music mercilessly sold the listener the goal of undying love as the root to happiness – without it was pain, with it salvation. The pop chorus is the modern paean to romantic love and happiness. But the nature of contentment is a complex thing and discontentment started to appear in a few 1960s pop songs albeit rarely.
The comfort and sadness of the minor key

Another bit of evidence that tells us tastes have changed with values - or that values have been shifted through tastes - is how the pop song’s actual musical structure has changed. Music in a minor key has long been associated with sadness or emotional connection whilst music in a major key invokes happy, easy, cheerful emotions. In fact it had been shown that music in a minor key, whilst emoting sadness or urgency, also invokes emotions that are beneficial. Both women and men can produce more of the hormone prolactin directly upon hearing music in a minor key. This musical form and its attendant emotions can be comforting and soothing; and in turn producing prolactin aids cognitive clarity and empathy with others. In the 1960s most pop songs were written and recorded in a major key; by 2000 most songs were written in the minor key. So minor key modern pop music can actually induce pro-social emotional states.

Songs like this one that have been reconfigured for the twenty-first century (in the film the Big Lebowski 32 ) with its individualistic, psycho-analytical themes:

“I pushed my soul in a deep dark hole and then I followed it in
I watched myself crawlin’ out as I was a-crawlin’ in
I got up so tight I couldn’t unwind
I saw so much I broke my mind
I just dropped in to see what condition my condition was in”33

“Just dropped in” by Mickey Newbury

As a final note on happiness here’s what the funny yet sympathetic character of Gary says about therapy from the Radio 4 comedy-drama Nurse34. The hapless Gary is being asked to think about having CBT - Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. Gary is morbidly obese and his mum keeps feeding him up. In response to the nurse’s offer of therapy Gary says:
“That’s like counselling is it? You lie on the couch and say ‘sorry Mr Freud it was all my mother’s fault!’”
3) Marx – Conflict Theory and the Dynamic of Difference

“It is not the consciousness of men that determines their social existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness”

Introduction:

The cash nexus has taken over as the dominant social bond that drives social action and social exchange between people and institutions. It displaces traditional social bonds in society that have to become entirely subservient to it. Is this 1880 or 2015? This chapter will enlighten the question. Today even the Governor of the Bank of England, as one of the highest paid economists and defenders of what he now calls inclusive capitalism laments its recent failings:

“...unchecked market fundamentalism can devour the social capital essential for the long-term dynamism of capitalism itself”

The theories and insight of Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels are alive and well in some circles as capitalism struggles to survive as a system. What is most interesting about Marx is his reading of social relations at the time in late nineteenth century Europe though his reputation is as a political scientist and economic theorist. This chapter introduces Marxism and discusses contemporary issues including the new property-class; the new world mono-class, oligarchial power and Marxist theory in today’s world. Marx and Engels gave life to a reading of social relations that are energised more by the dynamic of conflict than by any ‘natural’ human, evolutionary drive toward consensus. This, in turn, gave rise to Marxian interpretations of everything from social relations, politics and government through to literature, economics, feminism and religion.
The Context:

The quote at the top illustrates what Marx had to say about the very essence of humanity and its formation as influenced through the process of social relationships.

Like Durkheim, Marx was concerned with the ravages of industrialisation. He observed the emergence of a new industrial working class or proletariat and he contrasted its economic gains with the similarly newly emerging elite class of capital-owning industrialists. At the time 19th century economic growth had generated enormous material wealth especially in the UK where Marx conceived most of his analysis. Unlike Durkheim or Comte, Marx identified conflict and division at the core of social life, rather than there being a natural social evolution toward consensus, cohesion or a balanced structural function to social institutions.
The ideas:

Marx observed capitalism as founded on *structured social relations*; and that these relationships were unequal. People required freedom, and this freedom meant removing the shackles of poverty, misery and political oppression. Labour organisation was to become the means to this end and to the goal of contesting and solving the problem of inequality. Through historical analysis Marx identified class-conflict as the motor of historical change. Feudal lords had overtaken an ancient communistic society of hunter-gatherers. New capitalist ownership was displacing the power of aristocratic feudal landlords and slave-ownership was no longer prevalent. In the future, Marx predicted, the organised working class would take over power from the capitalist elite class. *Communism* would displace the power of the capitalist class and shift the means of production and wealth towards egalitarian, common ownership.

For Marx there was the question of why industrial workers were dissatisfied. Division of labour into highly specific jobs created work that was dirty, dangerous and dull. This industrial misery *alienated* workers from the intrinsic value of their work and created a mass of *wage-slaves*. Marx also criticised the centuries old Guild System not for their control of labour but rather for their rigid gradations of social relationships and inbuilt domination of the powerless by the powerful. Political-economic analysis of capital accumulation posited the notion that labour-power – the selling of labour to capital owners – was the only source of capital accumulation or what we now understand to be profit, growth and wealth. Only in capitalist societies is labour disentangled from other social patterns namely family, kinship, community and religion. Marx was no romantic about the humble peasant toiling happily in the countryside though many of his contemporaries in the 1800s did romanticise an ‘old’ pastoral idyll.37
For Marx the phenomenon of the capitalist class and the employed worker marked a fundamental shift in social relations and that this relationship was and would continue to be conflictual. Capital accumulation was dependent upon labour and thus capital-labour relations were the new frontier of change in society. Marx saw the rentier\textsuperscript{38} capitalist exemplified by the new industrial factory and mine owners as the cause of conflict, difference, poverty and inequality.

For Marx, class\textsuperscript{39} was the manifestation of conflict and division. Capitalist owners of the means of production and the new industrial working class were dependent upon one another - workers need income; capital needs workers. However this was no power-relationship of equals with comfortable, reciprocal exchange as is so often inferred by classical market economics of the time and by modern-day neo-classical economists and socio-economists.

“\textit{The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones}”\textsuperscript{40}

Marx predicted that revolutionary change would take place as the inevitable result of class conflict and unequal power between social classes. Workers were bound to organise together as a result of their mutual interests. Such labour organisation would involve the overthrow of the capitalist class and the state that protected its interests. Marx did also qualify this by suggesting that no ‘mode of production’ ever ended before its full potential had been exhausted. Capitalism, Feudalism, The guild System and Mercantilism are just such modes of production. Stages of development and potentiality for change varied between the different countries of Europe. It is the relationships between social classes that drives economics in Marxian analysis and it is this social theory that underpins the economic system and capital accumulation.
Labour had become a commodified ‘good’ traded much like other goods and services but not traded either freely or on a level playing field. Changes in technology or market fluctuations may produce a temporary gain for the capitalist owner but it was only through labour productivity and (low) wage costs that profit could be consistently made and capital accumulated. So labour is the valorising (or value-added) commodity and it is this surplus value that the capitalist class uses in order to earn its living and accumulate material goods and wealth. As a consequence of this workers inevitably become pauperised, poorer in real terms and comparative terms, and they will become more so if their power and bargaining ability - such as it is - becomes further eroded. Parallels have been drawn between the impoverished early-period factory worker, the indentured migrant worker of the colonies and the low-waged service worker of the fast-food restaurant, call centre or hotel in the modern world. Though labour-power has freedoms quite different from bonded slavery, the proletariat are wage-slaves in Marx’s analysis; they have no alternative means of subsistence other than through selling their labour. The cash nexus has indeed taken over in the world as he saw it and it became the new dominant bond displacing traditional social bonds in society – those of kinship, family and whole community with their interdependent, proximal or mutually subsistent properties. The social organisation of the class system gives rise to the power of the capitalist elite. Marx later revised his analysis of the two-class system acknowledging the emergence of a middle-class of administrators, engineers, accountants and so on. These specialist occupations were required in order to maintain a more advanced capitalism.

Having identified unequal relations between classes; the theory of surplus value; a new capital-labour conflict; alienation; wage-slavery; and a persuasive common interest between workers Marx predicted conflict and the necessity for revolutionary change.
‘Capitalism creates its own gravediggers by creating the industrial proletariat. They grow in number ...and recognising their shared interests mobilise to overthrow capitalism’

In much of Marx’s work there is much said about the nature of capitalism as a social system that drives economic organisation and exchange; its genesis in unequal class relationships; and its pre-disposition to crisis. There is less said in Marx’s work about the predictive certainties of revolution and the characteristics of an alternative, as yet unknown, system evolving to replace it. Here are some modern day concerns looked at through the lens of a Marxian viewpoint.
Today’s issues:

1) Property-class, the Income Gap and *Generation Rent*

![Diagram](image)

A century of home ownership and renting

1. In 1918... majority of households rented...
2. ...but from 1953 owning started to increase faster than previously...
3. ...and by 1971 equal % owning and renting...
4. ...however between 2001 and 2011 first fall in ownership over the century

Within the rental sector, the split between private and social renting has changed over the past century

1. Social renting increased following the Housing Act of 1919...
2. ...and by 1981, 31% of households were in socially rented homes...
3. ...but social renting fell following the introduction of the ‘Right to Buy’ scheme in 1980...
4. ...and by 2011 the percentage of households socially renting had fallen back to 18%

Source: Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) & Census
A little under two-thirds of households in the UK are privately owned. Many people in private housing, though nowhere near all, have cheaper housing due to having paid off all or some of their mortgage debt and having ownership of a capital asset. A large proportion of the baby-boomer generation – those born in the post war 1946 to 1964 baby-boom - enjoy a measure of income from housing assets and private pensions. This contrasts starkly with the younger generation who are far less likely to enjoy such security and a third of the population at least have never enjoyed and will not enjoy the fruits of housing capital.

‘Generation Rent’ will not be enjoying the financial and housing security of their parents and grandparents. Worst still incomes for the under 25s have fallen 15% since the 1990s and the most educated of these will endure significant graduate debt. So it is no surprise that the political hyperbole shouts out the injustice of the baby boomers having free housing and free pensions whilst bonding generation rent to a lifetime of debt and austerity. This contradiction at least leaves younger people, unsurprisingly, labelled also as ‘Generation Vexed’. This picture is similar across the Anglo-Saxon world (USA, Australia etc.) where private housing ownership has historically been highly cherished. In most other European countries the rented sector is not seen as a less-good alternative and the housing asset gap is either non-existent or negligible. This circumstance has created a division between a minority who are asset rich and, in part of their lives, living off their capital assets. This contrasts starkly with those that never have and never will be asset-rich or income-secure irrespective of how hard they work.

Marxian analysis would probably see this as a new ‘have’/’have-not’ divide again based upon on capital accumulation of one class at the expense of another albeit that such accumulation is more diffuse and diverse.
A further substantial gap exists between the very rich and the very poor in the world. On average the wealthiest 10% are nearly nine times wealthier than the poorest 10% as shown below.42
2) Oligarchs in the West, Oligarchs in the East

“...with all the trouble in the world nobody should own a yacht that sleeps more than 12!”

So says the hilarious character of ‘Shell Oil Junior’ played by Tony Curtis in the 1959 movie *Some Like it Hot*.

Amongst the richest 10% across the world are a ‘class’ of new capitalists who’s power and control over economies is ‘oligarchial’ – that is they have especially dominant power over particular industries, finance or territory. Commonly used as a derisory term for Russian billionaires the western oligarchs in banking, oil and gas and trans-national businesses control considerably more international resources and engines of policy-decisions than do the so-called Russian oligarchs. Also, in the light of the banking and stock market crashes of 2008 onwards, many oligarchs are remarkable resilient to economic downturn. Interestingly this new and ever-wealthier business class exhibits many of the traits of group closure or social closure. Entrance to the high flying business class is highly restricted. They appoint one another to their company boards and restrict entry. They have tight international social networks that encourage marriage between similarly oligarchial families and social networks. They popularise themselves by acquiring publicly loved institutions like football teams or university departments and thus take over a measure of cultural capital. This adds to the economic dependency that they have engineered and gives them a cultural cache amongst the general population. Their disproportionate power requires politicians to negotiate with them and incentivise them to favour their constituency, especially with investment decisions. They also sponsor democratic power if not holding direct office themselves. They have even shifted further sponsoring power through funding republican, Democrat or
British Conservative politicians to, in some cases, directly seeking office.

3) Marxism Today?

If Marx were alive today no doubt he would observe that the oligarchial power elite, with its influential followers in politics and in business, is a *super-capitalist class*. This new elite has the ability to politically influence and control assets far outstripping the dominant tendencies of their industry-owner forebears in the nineteenth century. Since there was then no large-scale social welfare or public education in the nineteenth century Marx might well have criticised today’s domination by the monopolistic state of these provisions as he took a dim view of statism. Marxist historicism has come in for much criticism from commentators in the popular media who are quick to dismiss a Marxist analysis as outmoded especially in the light of the collapse of communism in the 1980s.

At the same time the progressive nature of neo-classical economics is as discredited. Free market conditions upon which the capitalist model depends, appear to rarely hold. For instance financial markets spectacularly failed both financially and theoretically in the 2007/8 financial crisis. The world is yet to recover from the crisis. At the time stock-market values in no way reflected true values due to speculation and the manipulations of the markets with complex financial instruments. A second ‘market failure’ is the cherry-picking, partial deployment of the free market model by policy makers. Even the most enthusiastic free-marketers in the UK and the US, and to a fairly large extent across the EU, corrupt their own market model. Markets require free movement of the *factors of production* – capital and labour. Publics across the world have been persuaded to accept the free movement of capital whilst restriction is placed upon the movement of labour through
immigration controls. Irrespective of the social or political differences as regards restricted immigration the act of restricting it directly contradicts the conditions for the free market. Politicians and policy-makers hold up modern capitalism as one of the few late-modern ideas upon which we must depend. Of course the European Market upholds a more authentic approach as regards movement of people with mostly free movement of labour built into the model, but only within the EU or Schengen Area countries’ borders, and then too with limitations on freedoms. Elite-driven financial austerity in the West; the unexpected endurance of China’s communist party; the Arab spring uprisings against state authority\textsuperscript{46}; a new capitalist crisis; and the extra-ordinary power of international oligarchs and business leaders all have given rise to some resurgence of Marxism.

Yet also Marx would observe a set of different capitalisms at play not much like his world. Late European-Model capitalism devotes considerable resources to social equality and health care, for instance in the social model of Germany, Sweden or Denmark. Also Marx would be surprised by the continuous and extraordinary wealth generated by mature capitalisms across the world.

Markets, and therefore ‘actors’ in the marketplace situation, are operating in the social world with all its capacity to make and shape behaviour. Actors are influenced, amongst other things by social relations and status competition. Markets are not strictly naturally occurring and nor do they operate autonomously of other social rules, relations and institutions. So goes the sociological idea of social embeddedness as explicated by Granovetter\textsuperscript{47} and others. Social embeddedness has enriched a post-marxist and pluralist notion of economic sociology.
Working class, middle class or mono-class?

Social class as defined by income and occupation is getting less easy to specify in the twenty-first century. In many modern societies self-definition of class is unpredictable and counter-intuitive. For instance in many cases large majorities define themselves as middle-class. To muddy the once clear waters further, occupations classified as working-class such as a plumber or an electrician often have larger and more reliable income streams than some middle-class occupations such as teaching or sales and marketing. Also many occupations and work activities are ever-more internationalised in both the services and manufacturing fields. Workers have more careers-portfolio careers - and more jobs at once. Now there is not necessarily a uniform major advantage for all graduates over the manually qualified.

Though there may well be sharp distinctions to be made between the elite, moneyed class and everyone else – the ‘everyone else’ is made up of more complex social groups, economics and class structures. Previously distant social groups have become closer in character. For instance young educated people, the old industrial working class and immigrants often experience similar economic patterns and live proximally. Employment and housing have changed shape and globalisation has brought together common experience amongst previously separated social groups. The new ‘precariate’ experience insecure jobs, low pay, casualised working and hazardous living very much day-to-day. The precariate class – a play on the old proletariat – are a new and growing class with unpredictable and hazardous lives. This now normal existence for many is in sharp contrast to the relative security and predictability on the Baby-boomer generation and Generation X. Analysis of modern and relatively wealthy economies such as Japan, the US and the UK shows an emerging and substantial new precariate class. Like their predecessor ‘proletariat’ in the nineteenth century they too have
insecure lives. Yet unlike then modern economies are wealthy and advanced. A new class divide is the difference between the impoverished precariate and the technical middle class. The former are cash poor and often time poor as well unable to participate in the richness of modern life and culture. Also elements of the technical middle class are cash rich yet time poor. Policy makers now have many concerns about these new class divides as social participation, mobility and psychological well-being are becoming compromised. For instance reported levels of on-going anxiety amongst younger people are rising at alarming rates.

The precariate is characterised as a new ‘mono-class’, a little tongue-in-cheek, by Douglas Copeland of the Financial Times in two of his suggestions for the modern social dictionary:
Social mobility

It has now become acceptable in policy circles to talk of social mobility as if it is somehow a cure-all for deprivation, unemployment, inequality and other social or economic ills. The theory goes that a key task of government is to enable as many individuals as possible to escape from a poorer class to a class that gives a greater hope of better economic, health and educational outcomes. Interestingly social class has to be defined to do this – usually by job-income or educational outcome like graduate status. Social mobility policy results in policy makers being excused from focussing directly on social equity or attempting to eliminate poverty, want and inequality. In fact this kind of social policy may even exacerbated inequality by aiming to emphasise difference and create more win-lose outcomes. As long as some poor children and young people escape poverty by getting rafts of qualifications so poverty and inequality will lessen so the theory goes. This is flawed on many levels other
than just this flawed base-proposition. It fails to tackle the causes of inequality which, incidentally, is the biggest reason for unhappiness according to well-being researchers. Also social mobility policy can stimulate life-choices and economic decisions that are inefficient – for instance young people choosing to study more degrees as degree-level jobs are falling in the absence of choice and in fear of future job competition. It creates an overqualified workforce with less flexibility, more indebtedness (graduate debt in particular) and more un-necessary barriers to job entry. Also there is considerable opportunity cost in graduate pathways limiting other time/career/training/job choices.

Conclusions:

Marxist analysis is alive and kicking. The supposed end of history notion of the post-modernists looks premature as the one great idea that holds all together in its wake, capitalism, is truly in crisis and its theoretical integrity is shown to be wanting. As a result quasi-marxian views of the historical inevitability of crisis are again on the intellectual conversational agenda as well as on the streets via protest, anti-austerity and anti-capitalist movements. A capitalist critique is also in the diplomatic discourse of governments in South America, China and southern Europe; even micro-enterprises across the world try to create their own definition of capital through inventing new currencies or ways or trading that bypass the normal manifestations of capitalism. Since this chapter was published in its first form the unsustainable crisis of inequality has been hotly debated. Marxian influenced theory and commentary is back en vogue such as with the new-capitalism inclined and Marx influenced Thomas Pikety. His work concludes that inequality is unsustainable and at a breaking point heralding a new crisis of capitalism.

Introduction:

This chapter describes the unique contribution to social theory made by the German sociologist Max Weber. His ideas about human rationalism, the protestant ethic and comparative religion founded a particular sociological approach concerned with human organisation.

This chapter introduces his work and contains some features on modern day topics – the rise of the East; cognitive bias, behavioural economics and ‘how rational are we’ with a fun little puzzle; and a look at the bureaucratic model as the pervasive organisational form today. These topics are informative in their own right plus they show Weber’s legacy, drawing out comparisons with his theories bringing original thought and synthesis into today’s world. Max Weber could have laid claim to a unique explanation as to why capitalism happened in some countries and not in others. Were he so bold he could also have claimed to have explained and conceptualised ‘management’ and invented what would become a dominant form of human organisation in the modern world.

The Context:

Germany was experiencing a later yet more rapid industrialisation in the second half of the 19th century following its unification in 1871. With industrial expansion came rapid social transformation. Scientific rationality had gained ever more credibility with great advances in medicine, biology and engineering. The credibility of science and scientific thinking made it more possible, for instance, to view religion and religious leadership through the lens of a secular social scientific approach
– bringing scientific method to the study of human relations and social phenomena.

**The ideas:**

Weber’s intellectual canon ranged across religion, industrialisation, law, history, political leadership and what today we might call a ‘grand theory’ of organisational behaviour. Weber studied, comparatively, the social action of different religions namely in China, India, and through the texts of ancient Judaism plus unfinished work on Islam. This work was most famously synthesised in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* in 1904-5. Weber’s work explained capitalism’s roots embedded in the religious sensibilities of Protestantism, Puritanism and Calvinism – all post reformation creeds in the Protestant tradition. He was concerned about explaining authority and its legitimacy and therefore underpinned the later sociological sub-discipline of ‘power’. Like Karl Marx he too was intellectually exercised by the transformational power of capitalism, its universality and its enduring sustainability. Unlike Marx he was not convinced that a capitalist crisis was certain, nor that a capitalist ethic was confined only to the conduct of an elite, industry-owner class.
Max Weber’s ideas in brief

1. Protestant Ethic and capitalism’s origins:

The capitalist mode of production and social organisation started somewhere and it was, somehow, perpetuated. Through studying several religions and traditions Weber posited the notion that the idea of capitalism – *The Spirit of Capitalism* - was made possible by the Protestant creed. Predestination and salvation were key protestant beliefs and they focussed the mind on the necessity to be saved. Living a virtuous life was essential to being saved. The denomination preached the virtues of work, money, self-control and denial of earthly pleasures as connecting virtues. These virtuous ideas were espoused most in the more extreme forms of the denomination such as Calvinism. Such influential figures as Benjamin Franklin, a founding father of America, waxed lyrical* on the topic. Protestantism proselytised the actions of saving, frugality, money and accumulation as both virtuous and a ‘calling’. Since it was not possible to know who was to be saved and who faced eternal damnation life conduct was the proxy measure of a person’s worth and virtue. Protestantism originated as a countervailing movement of change; it rebelled against the authority of the Catholic Church. Protestantism has no certain, temporal leadership i.e. no earthly authority. The deferment to divinity ultimately requires the individual to behave in certain ways in order to achieve salvation and avoid damnation. How one leads one’s life determines the nature of final judgement and salvation. Prudence, money, dedication to lifetime craft and work were virtuous whilst idleness, sloth and debt were sins. In contrast Catholic clerical authority and adherence to it and to the sacraments facilitated salvation. Thus a different cultural ethic in non-
protestant influenced countries made for different narratives of development.

Interestingly Weber labelled many early capitalist business people as ‘heroic entrepreneurs’ as they were often, to an extent, anti-authoritarian.

*Benjamin Franklin articulated the burgeoning capitalist notion when he wrote about money in 1748:

“Remember, that time is money.....Remember, that money is the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Five shillings turned is six, turned again is seven and threepence, and so on, till it becomes a hundred pounds. The more there is of it, the more it produces every turning, so that the profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation”

This is Benjamin Franklin’s ‘Advice to a Young Tradesman’ written in 1748

2. Charismatic leadership:

Leadership, social change and significant historical events can be shaped by charismatic leadership and through the behaviours and action of followers and acolytes. Though charismatic leadership and ‘domination’ may be inconsistent and hard to justify in any legally fair, consistent or morally legitimate sense today, it nonetheless can make a difference to the shape of national events. The similarly charismatic but wholly different personalities of, say, Bismarck in Weber’s day or later Gandhi, Hitler or Mandela bears testament to the transformative power of the charismatic leader.

3. Bureaucracy:

Capitalism, industrialisation and productive rationalisation gave rise to the broadening of a legal-rational model of organisation in order to make complex systems work consistently. Bureaucracy requires *operatives* to be consistent, expert, rational and detached (see discussion p 66 to 69).
4. Rationalisation of production:

This is the main ingredient and dynamic to *modernity* and the means whereby industry and commerce is organised and progresses. Industrial organisation will continue to accelerate the division of labour and efficiencies, whilst science and technology will be the innovative tool of production.

Weber speculated that rationalisation of production, in potentially many variable forms of capitalism, would continue and accelerate. He was right.

Fordist manufacturing with its consistent approach led to mass production in the West. After two periods of economic crisis and world war rationalisation and mechanisation continued and accelerated across the world. From the 1940s through to the late 1960s the long boom in the west gave rise to a growing services economy organised also on rationalist, Fordist principles. The *Japanisation* of manufacturing in the 1970s fuelled further productivity gains through rationalisation as well as stimulating the rise of new industrialised economies in China and elsewhere in South East Asia.
5. **Rational-Legal authority:**

Weber conceived three kinds of organisational models that described the organisation of society or the polity. Weber also called these ‘models of legitimate domination’\(^{51}\). They are:

a) the ‘Legal’ model under-pinned by legal, constitutional formality;
b) the ‘Traditional’ model under-pinned by the sanctity of traditionally held views and customs, usually with inherited or bestowed authority; and
c) the ‘Charismatic’ model under-pinned by a more voluntaristic devotion to an individual and their leadership.

(for more see discussion below and Appendix 1)

6. **Western superiority:**

The domination of the world by a few western nations was due to their power over production and productivity, resultant wealth, trade control and military superiority.

At least two centuries of political domination by the West was followed in the early 20th century by the rising might of the USA. The American *military-industrial complex* secured and maintained economic and industrial domination; superiority in world trade; and unique power over world governance alongside similarly unique military superiority and strength.
Pervasive rationalism:

Weber identified the sweeping influence of rationalisation in all areas of life and the rising eminence of the *instrumental rationality* ethic. Rationality is focussed on the best and most optimal course of action to achieve an end or solve a problem. Instrumental rationality is focussed on the means of achieving a given end or solution. So say your goal is to get a first class degree. Your decisions will be based entirely upon the achievement of that goal – that is in the *instrumental-rational* view of the world. You will deploy whatever instruments and means necessary to achieve that goal and reason the optimal path required to achieve it. Instrumental rationality excludes value-judgement of the means to the end. This ends-driven, calculative approach was culturally adopted from science and deployed in the analysis of political and industrial organisation. Such efficiency and ends-orientated rationalism had been influenced by Utilitarianism\(^\text{52}\). Weber observes this calculative tendency increasingly deployed in all works of life and his work also observes problems with a slavish devotion to rational decision-making and organisation.

Bureaucracy:

Like it or not *bureaucracy* has been one of the most enduring and replicated organisation-structure and political forms. Weber observed its formation and recurrence and explained the social, political and economic drivers for it. Bureaucracy, with its rule-bound rationalist core, was - and still is - the organisational manifestation of western rationalism. As a writer and theorist Weber was no enthusiastic management guru-like character such as today’s management big-idea enthusiasts like Peter Drucker or Rosabeth Moss-Kanter. On the contrary, he lamented the stifling, *iron-cage grip*\(^\text{53}\) that bureaucracy was able to wield over human agency and freedom. He adeptly brought together economics, politics and, by extension, religion to conceptualise
the social form of bureaucratic management. Bureaucracy would, over time, become the universalised organisational form for managing capitalist systems. As part of this process it would also become the naturally evolved method of management for the burgeoning public sector across the world such as the massive bureaucracies of the Indian railway system, The US military or the British National Health Service. Bureaucracy’s power to capture and deploy human activity was enthusiastically constructed in revolutionary communist states too as well as in mixed economies.

Was Weber the inventor of ‘Management’?

In this context of Europe around 1900 Weber can qualify as the originator of rationalist bureaucracy and thus the unwitting inventor of what we now call ‘management’. Bureaucracy has been an enduring, replicated and re-invented form of organisation and management. Like so many influential and incisive thinkers Weber ranged across disciplines. His conception of the bureaucratic form of human organisation speaks from early-era sociology and political economy, as well as speaking to the modern-day subjects of management, organisational behaviour, business strategy and public sector management.
Bureaucracy – The Dead Hand or the Beating Heart?

Bureaucracy is the impersonal administration of authority according to rational rules\(^5\). Bureaucracy has these features in its pure form:

- **Goal orientation** - bureaucracy fulfils a purpose and goal and it is this goal that defines its work. It is not designed to be, necessarily, efficient or lean and within the bureaucratic model there is not an inbuilt mechanism that drives efficiency as there is in a market.
- **Technical purpose** - bureaucracies evolve; they are rarely invented. They evolve in order to technically manage human and economic activity such as the East India Company’s management of trade in the 18\(^{th}\) century (one of the earliest bureaucracies) or the administration of the police or public education.
- **Rules that all actors work within** - these may be explicit and transparent or they may be implied or even secret.
- **Impartial** - bureaucratic work is carried out in accordance with universal law and rules derived from these laws; so it is not partial to particular interests or individuals.
- **Impersonal** - as bureaucracy exists to fulfil some kind of universal purpose it is not driven by or driven for individuals, nor it is influenced by individual whim.
- **Accountable** – Actors in a bureaucracy have clear and transparent responsibilities and accountabilities.
- **Hierarchy** - Lines of accountability are clear with little room for autonomous decision-making at the bottom of the hierarchal pyramid, with rising levels of decision-making authority the higher up the chain of command. This is much like most military organisations from Rome and Sparta through to the US Army and the Third Reich. Military authority structures were a natural, cultural reference point in the first half of the twentieth century when modern-age bureaucracy was establishing itself.
- **Separation of official activities and private lives** - official operatives who work for the bureaucracy do so in a sphere entirely separate from their private lives and financial affairs.
- **Meritocratic/officials appointed from above** - as bureaucracies mature, appointments are more likely to be made on the basis of merit rather than influence. Bureaucracies also operate in a cultural context where what constitutes merit - for instance ability, social class, time served, qualification - will be culturally determined as regards the ingredients and level of importance of each meritocratic criterion.

Human organisation and society evolved rapidly in the 19th century following many centuries of traditional authority. The baron, lord or factory owner made decisions as he saw fit and therefore actions, decisions and outcomes could be arbitrary. This is not rational as Weber saw it.

Societies contain a mixture of legal-rational authority, traditional authority and charismatic authority (as shown in the Appendix one chart) and there are strong relationships between the three. It takes a charismatic leader to challenge tradition. Rational, technical and organisational needs and preferences suggests the necessity for a rational rule-bound organisational form such as bureaucratic organisation.
Today’s issues:

1) The Rise of the East

China is on track to become the biggest economy in the world over-taking the US in terms of its economic output. Japan led the way for rapid industrialisation in the East, super-fast economic growth and staggering levels of saving from the 1970s through to the 2010s. Hot on the heels of Japan were the tiger economies of South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan and parts of Indonesia. These countries industrialised from infancy to maturity in a couple of decades. Such a process took western countries half a century or more. In the 21st century a similar process of rapid industrialisation has taken place in China and with much greater scale implication for the balance of power in the world. China is 10 times the size of Japan and 26 times the size of Korea. Why did this industrialisation happen so fast?

Part of the explanation is socio-cultural and Weberian analytical insights would perhaps explain part of the global rise of the East. Confucianism, Shinto and Taoism revere mastery, deference to authority and harmony with the natural world. They are not theist religions and are founded by ancient masters rather than prophets or belief systems that espouse words of gods or divine guidance.

Charismatic authority has facilitated the development of predictable and relatively efficient bureaucracies at government and, to an extent, top company level. Chinese and Japanese education is rationalist, pragmatic and collectivist almost beyond measure. For instance children are focussed on mathematic performance to a very high level whilst their linguistic and writing skills are generally higher than children in the west. These factors have their root in an earthly, rationalist approach to life, progress, learning and purpose, alongside a collectivism that culturally trumps individualism. This contrasts with
modern Western nation cultural norms where usually individuality is prized as an ethic above collectivist participation or duty.
2) The Rational Actor – How Rational Are We and How Random is the World?

On Rationalism, Utility and Choice:

Industry and progress in the 19th century was based on a rationalist theory and ethic. Today economics, management and accountancy are still pre-eminent ontologies – they are the worldviews through which most things are judged as they were in the last century. Each of these disciplines are similarly rooted in a rationalist ontology. Yet the explanatory power of the rationalist paradigm has been questioned by psychology and, more recently, the branches of sociological economics and behavioural economics. Today’s economics is dominated by mathematics and accountancy yet it is underpinned by essentially behavioural theory about the choices that all of us make. As rational beings people are utility maximising individuals. As such, people will consistently act in their own self-interest. We will go out there and get and acquire as much as we can for as little outlay or cost as we can – physical, financial, time-use and perhaps emotional outlay. We will naturally seek to minimise the costs of activity and maximise returns on our effort, investment, time and money. The resources of time, energy, money, natural resources etc are, after all, scarce. Where we are not acquiring the benefits, goods and pleasures we are seeking we will, again naturally, cut our losses and expend the scarce resources of our effort, money, resources, time etc. on something more profitable and satisfying. Is this a good enough explanation of how the human species operates? This Choice Theory is all that under-pins market systems yet is it robust enough?
Rational choice... in love, money, politics and everything!

Are human beings not motivated to deploy the utility maximising principle in branches of their lives beyond money – say in relationships, love, work, emotional outlay or any branch of their leisure and pleasure?

*Exchange theory* says that yes, people are so motivated and hard-wired above and beyond material, economic exchange:

‘...people enter into social relationships only if they are likely to gain a ‘profit’. If a relationship becomes loss-making for either participant then he or she will withdraw and ‘spend’ their efforts in more profitable ways.’

Rationalism and rational choice theory does not, necessarily, say that people are selfish as such; in fact it can be judged to be in our (self) interests to co-operate, to love, and to share. Exchange theory prompted yet further developments of the beneficial exchange idea into the political arena with the idea of *public choice theory*. Here electoral politics is given the aggregate, rationalist treatment. Can the *polity* not make political choices by constructing a raft of choices, with anticipated costs and benefits attached, that enable the electorate to make a rational choice about the bundle of policy ‘goods’ that they want politicians to put in place? This makes political choice more about purposeful priorities and less about ideals, tribalism or reactionary, negative choice so goes the theory. For instance, less personal taxation might be exchanged for fewer and leaner public health system (or vice versa) which was very much the vanguard of Thatcherism in the 1980s UK; or a public might back pricing controls on some goods seen as partially harmful (e.g. alcohol or sugar) in order to lessen use. Not enough has been written about public choice theory though it describes very well the centrist, less ideals-driven nature of party politics in the early 20th century and the influence of a more marketing orientated approach to
policy formulation. This kind of cost-and-benefit approach to political choice influenced how politics was done significantly across the world particularly following the collapse of Soviet Union.

Some commentators have associated public choice theory more with a right leaning politics that accepts a more economic, calculative and self-interested basis to political discourse and electoral/democratic choice. A more emotionally driven or idealistic politics is appearing once again, on the left and the right, especially with the rise in popularity of UKIP and the Green Party and their counterparts in continental Europe. Rational choice by the sovereign consumer is a first order condition for the market system to work. Yet also individual action is socially embedded – i.e. taking place within social systems and conditions of mutual influence, rules, and mores. Individual decision making is at times surpassed by the social architecture within which economic exchange takes place.

Individual actions are often far from rationally carried out in the most optimal interest of the person, and our social conventions can exacerbate our irrational biases and preferences.
Rationalism – limits and flaws

‘There is one way to be rational and many ways to be irrational’

Back in the 1970s, and for a substantial part of the 20th century, psychological consensus about the nature of a normal psychology coalesced around two underpinning themes: a) that people were essentially rational and, b) that deviation from the norm of rational, logical thought and decision-making was explained by emotion – for instance, love, affection, sympathy, fear or hatred. Hence the heart/head or gut-feel/think ideas entered a common understanding and lexicon - or myth - and these dualisms frequent our social use of psychological understanding, rightly or wrongly.

However behavioural psychology has challenged this assessment and consistently found systematic errors in judgements that we make – errors that are generally beyond our control or consciousness. Furthermore this process of cognitive bias and heuristic thinking and acting can be socially invoked or influenced rather than just a matter of individual judgement, cognition and action.
3) Cognitive bias and preferring the irrational?

Human beings are hard-wired to make judgements and find meaning and to mostly do this very quickly. We do it all the time and mostly un-consciously. We do this for good reason. We need to act fast, for instance in assessing danger or finding sustenance. Yet regularly we come to imperfect conclusions that are not mistakes as such, but biases and partial ways of thinking and acting. Clever people do it as do not so clever ones! - biases are not a function of intelligence.

Cognitive biases are ways of thinking that are sub-optimal and not entirely rational. These biases are mental habits that all of us have that are not, in all circumstances, in our best interests.

Colloquially we are all familiar with the common characterisations of cognitive bias. For instance we point out people who we believe are ‘loss averse’ (Loss Aversion Bias and Sunk Cost Effect) or prone to ‘wishful thinking’ (Optimism Bias). We ‘know’ that gambling is a mug’s game (Gamblers Fallacy). However many times heads appear when flipping a coin, it makes no difference to the odds of tails appearing next. We all have heard people saying that ‘I have heard it all before’ (Availability Heuristic) or ‘I knew that was going to happen’ (Hindsight Bias). These all are examples of cognitive biases.

We are also affected by the power of the group which may form, strengthen or enact our biases; we can be prone to ‘jump on the bandwagon’ (Bandwagon Effect, Groupthink). Also we may have been persuaded to do something or believe something on the basis of the context, the messenger or the place (Frame Effect). Here are some more examples and explanations. To get an idea of how cognitive biases work together several of them are brought together in the Next Big Thing/Money-Maker case study 2 pages ahead.

**Confirmation Bias -**
Confirmation bias is searching for and interpreting information that confirms a pre-existing belief. Here one can interpret very sketchy information as confirming one’s belief. For instance say that a new worker is being inducted into a company and that the company claims it is the best, cheapest, fastest etc. Once the worker is persuaded of this early information he or she will seek out or attach value to other information that confirms this pre-existing belief and pay less attention to information that does not. Here we also have an irrational primacy effect – that is information acquired early in a series is given more credence. This is common in our lives where, for instance, we may attach much to experiences in our so called ‘formative years’ that foster beliefs and attitudes that may be hard to shift in spite of factual evidence to the contrary later on.

Availability Heuristic -

A mental short cut or heuristic - i.e. a rule-of-thumb – where judgements are made about the probability of events based on how easy it is to think of examples. Consequences and a sense of the future are ‘available’ in memory and given greater magnitude and importance. This is an ‘I can think of it so it must be important’ kind of judgement. An amusing example might be looking at the question: Who is more likely to be adulterous? a) politicians or b) physicians and lawyers. You might well answer politicians. This is because this ‘fact’ is more available to you. Politician’s affairs and peccadilloes are reported and discussed in the popular media and those of physicians and lawyers generally are not. So here we have an availability bias. By the way the factual answer is physicians and lawyers!
Availability Cascade -

*Availability bias* can quickly become an irrational mass bias with a cascade of thinking rapidly becoming adopted via social networks. With this phenomenon shared biases are socially adopted at lightning pace through the viral power of mass media. Unreliable information can quickly not only become ‘common knowledge’ but policy making can be unduly affected too, with policy initiatives directed at addressing this bias-driven ‘common knowledge’.

Misleading the Masses! The MMR Case

Take the example of MMR vaccines. Many parents were persuaded to deny their children the MMR vaccine despite the risks of Measles, Mumps and Rubella outbreaks occurring and children being potentially harmed. People feared the risk of their children contracting autism. The evidence for this MMR-Autism link was somewhere between non-existent and weak; some said bogus. The risk of these diseases breaking out and harming children is a proven risk and the consequences to individuals and communities severe; the alleged autism link was speculative. Mass biases kicked in at the time. The *availability* of this apparent knowledge on an apparent MMR vaccine-autism link was made more available to more people, more often, and via more media whilst the real (risks) evidence was obscured. The *availability cascade* was further extended by promotion from charismatic actors and broadcasters depicting an apparent risk greater than any. For instance the BBC commissioned a play performed by Juliet Stevenson depicting with great emotionally charge an apparent horror that parents were terrified by. Later the supposed ‘evidence’ for the MMR and autism link was discredited whilst the US suffered a new measles outbreak and whole populations were and still are put at risk. This leads us
neatly into *Framing effect* – be wary of the charismatic bearing truths!

**Framing effect -**

Framing effect is taking actions and coming to judgements based on the context of receiving information – the context of time, place, medium or the person delivering the information. A typical one is being ‘taken in’ by a charismatic person, for instance a teacher in school or an inspiring person at work of the more charismatic politician. Someone in an interview on the TV or in politics or sport might be very persuasive with perhaps one idea or a candidate appearing to be more convincing than another, irrespective of the validity, reliability or rationality of their idea, claim, proposal or message.

**Optimism Bias -**

This is the belief that ‘good’ outcomes are more likely to occur than bad ones. It discounts the effect of random chance or events over which the individual has no control. Optimism bias generates an illusory sense of control over future events, random chance and the likelihood of desired outcomes actually happening. Related to this is the *planning fallacy* where the benefits of a given course of action are over-estimated and costs under-estimated. Related to this is also is the corollary *pessimism bias*. Here undesirable outcomes are over-estimated or not considered at all, again irrespective of the real likelihood of bad things happening and the role of random chance and unknowns. With an optimistic bias the mind is dealing primarily with the ‘known-knowns’ whilst minimising the influence of any ‘known-unknowns’. Any information unknown is not considered at all\(^6\). Optimism bias is not to be conflated with confidence, focussed decision-making or determined effort. These are reasoned judgements and the deployment of expertise and effort within known limits. Optimism bias, or pessimism bias, are about
errors of judgement and not about the deployment of effort, ability and confidence.

Groupthink is the tendency for individuals to take more of a risk as part of a group decision. That is, taking more of a risk than the individual would take were they faced with the same choice or decision but having to take this decision alone. In other words, groupthink is doing something as a group that you would not choose to do yourself given the same information and parameters. Related to this bias is the common myth of groups supposedly always having safety in numbers. The groupthink bias extends into the frequently exhorted view that because something is popular it is, de facto, correct and good.

Most of us prefer to fit in most of the time, which might be good for social cohesion but is not always good for our choice-making. This is why, or at least partly why in the work place corporate
accountability needs to be so carefully specified and rule-bound to avoid bad groupthink and to identify clear individual accountabilities.

**Out-group Homogeneity Bias** -
Members of a group see their own group members as more varied than members of another group which is perceived as homogeneous.

**Irrational escalation** -
Continuing with the investment of effort, time, money etc. in an activity that is making a loss - despite new information that shows the activity to be loss-making or non-beneficial. This can be as common in, say, failing or badly matched relationships as it can be in business.

**Just-World Hypothesis** -
The view that the world, and particular the social world, is ‘just’ and broadly rational; the consequence being that anyone who is disadvantaged, ‘badly done to’ or lacking must be responsible for this themselves.

**Fundamental Attribution Error** -
This is the tendency to reason personality traits as the causes of particularly actions or behaviours and to give less credence to situational and external factors.

.....and finally here is one that you, the reader might be feeling around about now...

**Bias Blind Spot** -
Which is the tendency to think that oneself as less bias than other people!
Example Case of many biases at play in one real-life story

The Case of the Money Makers or ‘The Next Big Thing’-

Someone comes up with a great money making idea where ‘you just can’t lose’ (Optimism Bias). One-by-one lots of people invest in the Next Big Thing and, at the beginning, people are making money. People are persuaded to invest more by nice, persuasive people who appear as confident, or extrovert and successful (Framing Effect). More people are then persuaded to put their money into this great idea also because their friends and neighbours are putting money into it (Groupthink, Bandwagon Effect Availability Cascade and, again Optimism Bias). The idea fails and fails badly but people stick with it for a little longer in the hope of retrieving their losses and thinking that the situation might get better (Irrational Escalation). There is no sympathy for the many people who have lost so much as the idea failed (Just World Hypothesis). The people who persuaded everyone to invest in the first place are pilloried for their mean and manipulative behaviour and their greedy personalities (Fundamental Attribution Error). This could be almost any failed economic bubble. It could be the housing bubble that broke western economies in 2007/8 perpetuated by the complex financial instruments invented by the banks. It could be the financial gifting pyramid that broke the Albanian economy. It could be the dot.com ‘boom’ that burst. Equally a scenario like this could be part of the pattern of disastrous social movements like eugenics or Nazism.
Why are we bias?
You might have thought that if human beings are broadly speaking rational would they not learn to correct bias? Or alternatively would the wonders of genetic or social evolution not help us to gradually weed out these unhelpful behaviours? These questions pre-suppose that we are only rational and calculating. We are not. If we were always calculating and assessing then we would be a slow, lumbering species and instead we are fast, innovative and adaptable due to the relationship between the unconscious powerhouse of our minds and the mediative tool of our conscious mind.

System one and system two

There are two ‘systems’ at work in the brain that enable human beings to think and act.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System One</th>
<th>System Two</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Automatic operations</td>
<td>• Controlled operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Quick</td>
<td>• Slow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No sense of voluntary control</td>
<td>• Effortful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses detection, orientation</td>
<td>• Uses calculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intuitive</td>
<td>• Deliberative</td>
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Moment by moment human beings are thinking fast. Unconscious processes in the human brain enable intention to be met; automatically orientating the person to everyday goals
using perception and memory. The brain prefers these automatic responses, and when there is not one automatic and fast response available then the slower, deliberative and calculating brain kicks in. So if you ask yourself what colour is the sky on a clear day? you get an automatic response. If you ask yourself what is 13 x 23 this demands a rather more calculative stop-and-think approach. Incidentally you might have asked yourself, with question one, what exactly is meant by ‘clear’ day, or you may have asked some other such clarificatory question. Here your brain is automatically searching out clear meaning as it does all the time and needs to all the time to enable good functionality and survival.

**Example of system one and system two thinking:**

Look at the diagram below for a short time – keep your gaze short. Which of the two horizontal lines is longer? Keep your gaze brief now!
You probably picked the bottom one as the longer horizontal line. The ‘signs’ straight away tell you that it is. Your brain quickly processes all the information at hand – the lines, shapes, arrows, line thickness, colour, proximity, inter-relationship etc. Your brain makes decisions based on all this data - mostly unconsciously. For most transactions in life this is a good thing! Your unconscious has to do most of the work of getting you through everyday actions. But the bottom line is not longer\textsuperscript{64}. Both horizontal lines are the same length. Your system one is overriding any calculation that your system two wants to make. Now look again. To correct this error your brain has to work hard, calculate, deliberate, iterate and re-iterate. See Appendix for the measured and correct diagram.

**Why Does this matter?**

Recognising cognitive bias and the power of the irrational is important at many levels. At the individual level it has even spawned a psycho-therapeutic school\textsuperscript{65} to try and help people eliminate unhelpful cognitive biases and habitualised thinking that is not helpful to them – i.e. re-rationalising if you like. It matters at the collective level if we are taking action that is irrational and riddled with error as the above Money Maker example demonstrates. It matters especially when we are taking actions and making decisions that affect our future, either individually or collectively.

In conclusion, and returning to the beginning of this chapter, ideas about human action and tendency has moved and progressed considerably since Weber’s day. We know a great deal more about our rational and irrational tendencies and a rich seam of economic sociology and behavioural psychology enables us to counter the ever-slavish devotion to all theories economic and ‘rational’.
In view of the evidence, Max Weber, were he here today, would not have it any other way. He would update social theory; update his grand theory and move on to the next proposition.
3) The Bureaucratic Model today

“...when I arrived at the EU I expected the French and German bureaucracies to be dominant. No it was the British bureaucracy because of its high standards”\textsuperscript{66}

This was Romano Prodi’s view when he was EU president. Bureaucracy and its basic tenets is alive and thriving as a model of human organisation. Some of the management literature portrays it as a slow, bumbling sloth that has been superseded by a super lean competitive organisation. This is a caricature that misses the point. Bureaucracy is a social model of organisation not a free-market economic model of organisation. It’s longevity and power is due to the fact that it:

a) universally, fairly and professionally deploys decisions and resources;

b) determines where and with whom authority and accountability resides

c) enables ‘business’ activity to be compliant with, and compatible to, its environment

It is not there to be profitable – if it is then this is a bonus. Bureaucratic organisation exists within companies, public sector organisations and large scale bodies such as the Chinese Communist Party and the US military. Bureaucratic organisation is one thing that these – and thousands of other organisations – have in common. The important point is that it can merely be part of a structure – it is an adaptable mechanism, happy to hook up with other organisational models. Yet people do not like bureaucracy hence the pejorative use of the term. It can suffocate and deter agency. Pure form bureaucracy has little space for autonomy. It prevents any kind of spontaneous action yet bureaucracy endures because it is fair, equitable, rational and, some would suggest, an inevitable means for organising human activity, particularly large scale human activity that requires
consistency. Expert-power rests with the official in the bureaucracy. This can be fundamentally dis-empowering for the actors let alone the users and consumers of the bureaucratic product. People are reliant upon permission from officials in order to act. Paradoxically, bureaucracy leaders can be disempowered because all too frequently they are too far away from the coal-face to know how things are done and reliant upon advice from lower-ranking experts. Bureaucracy is often seen also as taking on a life all its own especially when controls and changes seem impossible to implement – even with the will there is no way!

Examples of bad bureaucracy in Rotherham Council and West Yorkshire Police spectacularly failed to stop care staff continuing to conspire with a conspiracy of sexual exploitation; similarly in Stafford, hospital standards remained consistently poor and fatal for patients with staff unable to affect change and achieve the stated purpose of the organisation. These are examples of bad bureaucracy where accountability mechanisms have failed.

Bureaucracy and its many detractors have often cited the problem of bureaucratic organisations not getting things done and activity just being an endless circulation of activity with little to show for it at the end. People in bureaucracies are not seen as productive often because they are measured by a profit-seeking or material benefit yardstick which is not appropriate to the purpose of the bureaucracy. This said bureaucracy can indeed be efficient and efficiency can be driven through bureaucratic management methods.
The Effective NHS - A Great Public Bureaucracy?

The UK National Health Service grew enormously in the decade 2000 to 2010. Its *inputs* have grown – i.e. numbers of health care staff, clinics and hospital facilities. Incidentally a large part of increased spending was on capital assets. NHS *outputs* grew also at an unprecedented rate at this time. Numbers of procedures, GP visits, prescription rates and outpatient appointments illustrates the enormous growth in the healthcare sector – 20 million more appointments in outpatients over a 5 year period as the graph below shows.

Over this period costs of many procedures such as hip replacement reduced and the use of hospital beds became far more efficient. Success rates in diseases such as cancer improved and death rates diminished. Independent research has shows that the British NHS is the most efficient amongst 11 comparator countries ranking first-in-class as measured by quality, efficiency and access. There is therefore a great deal of evidence that counters the urban myth of the slow, disconnected bureaucracy of the NHS. This evidence shows the NHS to be ever more and not less efficient as well as more effective overall despite localised failings such as with Stafford.
A final literary note on bureaucracy:

Number of outpatient appointments in the four UK countries: 2005/06 - 2010/11

Number of prescription items dispensed per person per year in the UK
Charles Dickens caricaturised the powerlessness feeling of bureaucracy a little before Weber’s time in the novel Little Dorrit as shown in the quote below:

**Charles Dickens novel Little Dorrit** has the central characters keen to locate a legal will and they become caught up in the fictional Office of Circumlocution. At the top of the power pile are elected politicians who are regular targets for Dickens opprobrium:

“It is true that How not to do it was the great study and object of all public departments and professional politicians all round the Circumlocution Office. It is true that every new premier and every new government, coming in because they had upheld a certain thing as necessary to be done, were no sooner come in than they applied their utmost faculties to discovering How not to do it. It is true that from the moment when a general election was over, every returned man who had been raving on hustings because it hadn’t been done, and who had been asking the friends of the honourable gentleman in the opposite interest on pain of impeachment to tell him why it hadn’t been done, and who had been asserting that it must be done, and who had been pledging himself that it should be done, began to devise, How it was not to be done”

**Conclusion on Weber:**

Max Weber enabled capitalism to be understood as a western-world cultural phenomenon driven by religious and ethical values and symbolism He showed how it is sustained by rationalist science and engineering. He further grasped the
power of the rational management of human organisation and made it clear where ‘management’ came from with the prediction that the bureaucratic form would remain dominant as a universal concept. His work made clear the influence of faith, ideas and beliefs as well as rationalism and logic in shaping social institutions, politics and human organisation.

Had Max Weber not died prematurely in 1920 he probably would have pursued a political career with a very liberalist and progressive approach. He was one of the authors of the Weimar constitution and a contributor to Germany’s memorandum of War Guilt.

**Final Conclusions:**

This book has introduced some enduring theoretical approaches and dilemmas in sociology through the work of three founding theorists and through discussion of modern day topics. The theoretical ideas and analytical pedigree that classical sociological theory introduced well over a century ago remains real and relevant today. Perhaps this is because some of the underlying traits of our humanity change very slowly. Our need for survival; our unique capacity for love; our innovative capability as a species; or our collaborative and competitive traits: these are all constant traits that we experience and form socially.

The book has discussed questions like to what extend is societal continuity, human action and interaction defined by consensus or conflict? Weber and Marx, and their followers today, observe undercurrents of difference, competition, conflict and inequality as the engines of change. Conflicts and differences over, say, material goods, property, religion or custom both provoke
change and require systematic society-level organisation in order to be managed. A consensus view would emphasise the ingenuity and interdependence of people and communities and their capacity to change and adapt over time. Consensus and stable social structures have made improvements in huge social problems such as poverty, crime and disease. Consensus-driven functionalism would charge the sociologist with the task of shaping society and its institutions through empirical evidence such that they smooth the path of human interaction, action, progress and continuity. Society is a purposive thing and maintaining and understanding it such that the component parts of the system work in harmony is the important task. Curiously today far more attention is given academically and culturally to the psychological discipline than to social theory. We all have our own psychological theories about why things happen and it is fuelled by the modern media’s love of pop-psychology. Our modern-day obsession with economic measurement and material metricalisation emphasises another sociological dilemma. To what extent is social development determined by economic factors? Also to what extent is economic development determined by social, technological, financial, cultural and environmental factors? This is just as interesting to ask. This book has described and analysed economic and quasi-economic factors because this phenomena is driven by social relations. This is one area where social theorists from very different traditions and viewpoints would have some agreement including our three founding theorists - Durkheim, Marx and Weber. Social structures, behaviours and systems remain substantially driven by material matters.

Social structures underpin our culture, communities, families, economic activity, markets, investment, wealth and poverty and attention to understanding the social world with robust sociological analysis will help us all to flourish and make progress. Please pursue this quest in your own way and read
further into sociology beginning with some of the texts referred to in the Notes References and Links listed at the end.

Written by Jim Simpson – independent writer, researcher and consultant.

Thanks to Andrew Cain and Jeremy Gale for excellent suggestions, critical reading and commentary.

For more articles, essays, training materials, blogs and think-pieces go to the resource library guide at www.jimsimpsonconsultancy.co.uk/resource-library

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Appendix 1: Müller-Lyer illusion with measured lines
Appendix 2: Weber’s pure types of authority. The three pure types of authority or ‘legitimate domination’ adapted from Weber’s Economy and Society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Law</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. LEGALITY</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Instrumental rationality</td>
<td>Bureaucratic</td>
<td>Specialised</td>
<td>Legal Formalism</td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Value rationality</td>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>Rational Competence</td>
<td>Promulgation of natural law</td>
<td>Public service</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. TRADITION</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Patriarchy/ Patrimony</td>
<td>None/ gerontocracy / personal staff</td>
<td>Birth honour</td>
<td>Prescription precedent</td>
<td>Personalistic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estates</td>
<td>Personal staff</td>
<td>Fealty, Personal loyalty</td>
<td>Prescription</td>
<td>Personalistic</td>
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<td><strong>3. CHARISMA</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Voluntaristic devotion</td>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Substantive legal principles</td>
<td>Commitment to a cause</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1: What’s the point of sociology and who does it?

1 Weber, Max (1947) ‘Theory of Economic and Social Organisation’ translated by Henderson and Parsons

CHAPTER 2: Durkheim – The Collective Phenomenon Discovered

5 The France-Prussian or Franco-German war of 1870/71
6 An early term sometimes used for sociology and social theory that did not stick due to some academic rivalries over the term
7 Later, sociological ideas such as contingency theory would emphasise the lack of fixity and predictability in human endeavour and social relationships thus challenging the functionalist school of sociological thinking.

8 Solidarity used as a term, for instance, by the revolutionary workers movement in Poland in the 1980s Solidarność, and as the term for the giving of income from the not so fortunate to the even less fortunate by the Emmaus movement. Emmaus is a movement of social businesses that provide homes for homeless people, work for its resident ‘companions’, and recycling, re-use and restoration services for the community. It originated in France and spread to 15 plus other countries with about 32 centres in the UK at present.
9 Not to be confused with today’s ‘egotistic’ idea
10 Durkheim, E., 1952 (1897) ‘Suicide: A Study in Sociology’
This painting and many others can be viewed at the Watts Gallery
http://www.wattsgallery.org.uk/watts-gallery

Later sociological study and theory would unearth the latent, un-intended and un-stated social functions of social institutions for instance as shown in the work of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton

‘Agency’ meaning the capacity for people to act as they chose and see fit. It was not a term much in use at this time.


Bhutan is one such place where a national happiness index is used to guide government policy

Happiness Lessons from a New Science, Richard Layard, 2010


Ibid 11

ONS (Office for National Statistics)

The term internet is being used as it is ‘the net’ that is the globalised system of connections between computers that enables access to all forms and scales of communication between people who have computers.

The author worked with many business owners and managers whilst teaching in a business school and this included some internet winners in, for instance, people working in training services and fund-seeking and some losers in for instance, motor retail and electronics manufacture.

Sharing initiatives such as https://trustcloud.com/the-sharing-economy that are driven by a sharing ethic and not bound by ownership have proliferated as has alternative ideas of exchange such as through Bitcoin.

Delphi Method is a communications, collective opinion-forming and research technique. It involves experts or key participants giving their views on questionnaires in 2 or more rounds. Each round summarises and orders opinion and priority preferences of participants. This enables information giving, convergence, consensus-forming and summarising of views to be ordered and democratic.
They have considerable resources and a desire for market power. For instance the Facebook offering of $19 billion in order buy Whatapps or the 146 listed acquisitions and mergers by Google including $3.2 billion for Nest labs See: http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/44d4fc72-99b2-11e3-b3a2-00144feab7de.html http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_mergers_and_acquisitions_by_Google

Various scholars and experts have written about digital feudalism including Aral Balkam and Arvind Narayanan. Here are 2 sources for them: http://vimeo.com/81996741; https://citp.princeton.edu/event/narayanan/

45% of British women use the pill with a 60% usage rate in Germany and 35% use in Spain these being the high and low figures in Europe. Source: http://www.reproductive-health-journal.com/content/10/1/7

For instance women in most western countries are having their children later and, in more cases, having fewer children. Consequently the replacement rate for populations in most western countries has fallen. The TFR (Total Fertility Rate) i.e. number of babies each woman, on average, needs to replace the population at a constant rate is 2.1. Falling replacement rates has many consequences not least a medium to long term fall in the economically productive population that is required to support a growing older population as well as younger dependents. For statistics see http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/factbook-2013-en/01/01/02/index.html?itemId=/content/chapter/factbook-2013-2-en

Last line of the poem An Arundel Tomb by Philip Larkin 1956

Here is the very cheerful video to Pharrell Williams’ ‘Happy’ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6Sxv-sUYtM&feature=kp The song has had 730 million You Tube hits and rising.

Confluent love meaning love that emerges depending upon the circumstances. It is contingent, conditional, active and not like the forever qualities of romantic love.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhOKhJaM1QE
33 Written by Mickey Newbury made famous by Jerry Lee Lewis and Kenny Rodgers plus it has been covered many times by the likes of Tom Jones and for film and TV. The song was thought to be written as a cautionary tale against the ‘false happiness’ of hallucinogenic drug use.

34 *Nurse* broadcast on BBC Radio 4 March 19th 2014 with Paul Whitehouse sympathetically and warmly depicting a powerless character.

CHAPTER 3: Marx – Conflict Theory and the Dynamic of Difference

35 Re-capitulated from Marx’s *Capital* and discussed by Bob Jessop in *Key Sociological Thinkers* Chapter one


37 The Romantic Movement in music and poetry, such as Wordsworth or Keats’ poetry or Beethoven’s music, fuelled nineteenth-century nostalgia for the country idyll. Living off the land, the social structure of the countryside and the charm of the land-worker were the drivers for a nostalgic romanticism. This romanticism was hugely popular in Victorian England and was re-invented many times such as by the hugely popular Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood of painters (Rossetti, Millais, and Holman-Hunt). They added similarly romantic medieval themes and current day moral narratives to their work.

38 *Rentier* meaning the extraction of income through ownership of an asset and through exclusive ownership or control of that asset rather than through work or risk investment in an unfettered market.

39 Class being the grouping of people who have a common relationship by virtue of how they earn their living.

40 *The Communist Manifesto* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

41 *Ibid.* reference 34

42 OECD data as reported by the BBC

43 *Some Like It Hot* written by I.A.L. Diamond and Matt Malneck for the eponymous movie in 1959 directed by Billy Wilder. This hilarious
comedy turned out to be a bit of a sociological piece itself. It dealt with and depicted: the exceptional cultural capital of mobsters in 1930s America; itinerant workers travelling the length and breadth of the country – in this case musicians; gender stereotypes and archetypes; and even social class, which America usually prefers not to display in its films and other cultural cargos. The movie was voted best ever US comedy by the American Film Institute in 2000.

44 Historicism is analysis based on the idea of prediction drawn from observing historical patterns and ‘trends’. It assumes a kind of evolutionary nature to the development of society. Much derided by Karl Popper and later by post-modernists as over-deterministic. Future progress depends upon knowledge that is, in and of itself, unknown therefore how can anyone predict the nature of future events? This is how Popper saw it.

45 Free markets, *laissez-faire* or neo liberal economic organisation is based on the principals of the best use of scarce resources and on an open, competitive process of transforming scarce resources into saleable goods and services via the price mechanism and the interaction between buyers and sellers. Requires perfect competition – any or many producers/sellers responding to demand and supply conditions – i.e. all producers are ‘price-takers’ not ‘price-makers’; ‘perfect information’ amongst buyers prevails; plus the absence of ‘externalities’ – that is things that impede open market operation.

46 These so called revolutions originated in Tunisia and spread quickly to Egypt. In the Egyptian case the revolution was class based – mass dissatisfaction with the military elite whose unique bureaucracy dominated so much of economic and social affairs of the country as well as controlling military matters.

47 See explanation in Giddens and Sutton *Sociology* page 254.

48 *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*’ 2014 by Guy Standing analyses the emergence of this new, insecure social class and examines financial insecurity and the case for creating better financial security through rights based approaches.


50 Pikety, T. 2014 *Capital in the 21st Century*

51 Weber’s meaning here comes from a libertarian perspective where it is necessary to propose reasons why one actor should have any authority over another and why this domination could be legitimate as it runs counter to a sense of freedom. It is this search for legitimacy and competition for authority that stimulates Weber’s research rather than any pre-disposed want for domination in the modern sense of the term.

52 Utilitarianism’s most well known advocates were Jeremy Bentham and J.S. Mill. The ethic, later labelled consequentialism, identifies the ethical idea of the greatest good for the greatest number in any given course of action.

53 Weber’s ‘iron-cage’ metaphor for bureaucracy or ‘casing as hard as steel’ has been oft quoted and much used by many writers to criticise the freedom-limiting nature of the bureaucratic form.

54 ‘Public sector’ was not a term used at the turn of the 20th century and Weber would have referred to government or political leadership. Bureaucratically run public services grew significantly in the 1920s and 1930s with public education and basic welfare launching in most modern economies. Public sectors in different forms steadily grew continually through the 20th century to the 2008 banking crisis.

55 Interestingly many large international companies have re-invented a new ‘lean-bureaucratic’ form at the centre of their organisation that determines rules, policy, strategy and, purpose, legal compliance/process.

56 From the Oxford Dictionary of Sociology.

57 China’s population is 1.33 billion as reported by the US Census Board; Japan’s is 128 million and South Korea’s is 50 million.
Rational here meaning the assessment of the best course of action using broadly scientific principles or invariance in similar circumstances

Oxford Dictionary of Sociology entry on Rational Choice Theory refers to George Homan’s and Peter Blau’s work on Exchange Theory

Discussed in Dan Ariely’s book Predictably Irrational

As reported by Kahneman and Tversky in Kahneman, D., 2011 in Thinking Fast and Slow

Ibid. 42. Kahneman, D, Thinking Fast and Slow 2011

Ibid. 42. System one and system two are metaphorical terms for the operational parts of two different sets of function of the brain. System one and system two is useful shorthand for sets of functions that are alike that call upon different parts of the brain that deal with memory, cognition and emotional response.

This is the ‘Müller-Lyer illusion’

Out of interest this is Cognitive Bias Modification Therapy. Elements of it are used in many self-help and psychological techniques especially to counter pessimistic biases and to enable better rationalisation of future action and the likelihood of positive, neutral or negative occurrences.

Romano Prodi former President of the EU on BBC Radio 4’s Today Programme July 2014

"...an original project and it is certainly very well written" Catharine Gray, Senior Editor, Sociology, Routledge.

"It really stretched my perspectives on how deeply social theory ideas relate to our modern day issues and it helped me quickly get into classical theory too" Jeremy Gale, Mature Student.

"Back for the Future linked up a number of disparate big ideas. It gave me a great overview and some routes deeper into the subject." Andrew Cain, Management Trainer.

What would the great founders of modern sociology have to say about happiness, modern capitalism, generation rent or pop music? What were their ideas about? Back For the Future introduces the concept of sociological investigation and describes the theoretical approaches of Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber in the context of their times and through the big challenges in society today. World happiness research, the internet and ‘glocalisation’, sexual freedom and gender, ‘collective effervescence’, modern capitalism, the ever-present bureaucratic model of management in society, social behaviour and cognitive bias are some of the today’s world topics presented. You even get fine art samples, a fun puzzle and a great YouTube link to illustrate the ideas!

Reader testing highly rated Back for the Future as an introductory reader, a teaching and learning aid for the season’s scholar and as a text that cuts across disciplinary boundaries. It has useful teaching and discussion materials. Enjoy the book and please pass on recommendations to your friends and colleagues.