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A priori/a posteriori

We say that something is known *a priori* if empirical (observation-based) evidence is unnecessary: something may be true by definition, or inferred logically from other known facts. We say that something is known to be true *a posteriori* if its validity is proven by observed evidence.

See also **Axiom; Kant, I.; Paradigm; Problematic.**

Accommodation

The process whereby culturally distinct groups adjust to each other's presence and may then co-exist indefinitely without either group losing its defining characteristics. Alternatively, accommodation may be a stage in acculturation which leads eventually to full assimilation of one group by the other.

See also **Acculturation; Assimilation; Migration.**

Acculturation

One of several terms which describe processes that are triggered by migration and other events that bring two cultures into contact. Acculturation is the process whereby one group acquires the culture of the other. During this process the group that is being acculturated loses its original identity. The end product of acculturation may be full assimilation. Note, however, that acculturation may be reciprocal, and the outcome may be a hybrid culture.

See also **Accommodation; Assimilation; Migration.**

Achievement/Achieved status, Ascription/ascribed status

Achievement and ascription are alternative ways in which individuals can be allocated to social roles. A position is ascribed when a person is allocated by criteria over which he or she has no control: for example, age, sex, race or family origins. Individuals can then be educated and otherwise socialised to fulfil their destinies. Achieved positions are entered on the basis of performance, in education, or in tests of occupational skills and knowledge, for example.

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In practice there are usually elements of both ascription and achievement in operation. For example, jobs may require particular educational qualifications (which are achieved) but the likelihood of individuals gaining the qualifications may be related to their family origins (ascribed). Nevertheless, sociologists have always argued that, as societies modernise, ascription gives way to achievement. Hence the trends towards opening educational opportunities to all, outlawing labour market discrimination by race and sex, and nowadays combating ageism also.

See also Social mobility; Sponsored (and contest) mobility.

Action research

This is research where the investigator is involved in introducing changes in order to study the effects. The procedure is comparable to a scientific experiment except that in real social life it is very difficult to hold everything else constant, and there is always the danger of an observer effect, called a 'Hawthorne effect' in sociology.

See also Experiment; Hawthorne effect.

Action theory

The name for any approach in sociology that places the actor at the centre. The actor may be an individual or a collective actor (such as Protestants or the working class).

An action frame of reference (an alternative term for action theory) seeks explanations in terms of actors' goals and their knowledge and interpretations of their situations. Max Weber (1864–1920) is commonly regarded as sociology's founding advocate of this approach. His work was thus clearly distinguished from that of his contemporary, Emile Durkheim (1858–1917), who instructed sociologists to treat social facts as things and to seek explanations in terms of their relationships to other social facts. Symbolic interactionism is the leading example of an action theory.

Adopting an action frame of reference in sociology leaves open the question as to whether action creates social structure, or whether social structure is the source (via socialisation) of actors' frames of reference.

See also Agency; Symbolic interactionism; Weber, M.

Active citizen

An active citizen joins organisations as a member and to volunteer. Active citizens are the lifeblood of civil society.

One school of thought claims that active citizenship has declined. There has certainly been a steep decline in the memberships of the main political parties, trade unions and churches in many western countries. The debate is whether people are now active in different, newer organisations

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(concerned with the environment, for example), and whether they are participating in new ways (such as by email and in online communities).

See also Capital (social); Civil society; Communitarianism; Mobilisation; Social movements.

Etzioni, A. (1968), *The Active Society: A Theory of Social and Political Processes*, Free Press, New York.

Actor

The use of this term likens social life to a theatre where actors perform roles that are already scripted. This 'dramaturgical analogy' was prominent in the work of Erving Goffman (1922–1982). The analogy allows for actors to interpret and develop their roles in interaction with other players.

See also Agency; Goffman, E.; Role.

Adolescence

A term coined by the American genetic psychologist, G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924), and applied to the life stage following puberty. Hall characterised the life stage as a period of personal crisis, emotional turbulence and rebelliousness. Subsequently the term has remained associated with the view that the psychological and social changes that occur during the teenage years have roots in biological changes.

Present-day sociologists are more likely to describe the life stage as 'youth' and to stress its social construction.

See also Mead, M.; Youth.

Hall, G.S. (1904), *Adolescence*, Appleton, New York.

Adorno, Theodor Weisenrund (1903–1969)

A member of the Frankfurt School who became best known as a co-author of *The Authoritarian Personality*, a survey-based research project which claimed to have discovered the psychological roots of support for authoritarian regimes (specifically fascist regimes).

However, most of Adorno's work was in aesthetics and musical theory. He believed that artistic forms, including musical forms, were products of class interests and struggle, and he was the Frankfurt School member who was responsible for stressing how the popular music produced by the capitalist culture industry stupefied the masses.

See also Authoritarian personality; Critical sociology/critical theory; Frankfurt School.

Adorno, T., Frenkel-Brunswick, E., Levinson, D. and Sanford, R. (1950, 1991), *The Authoritarian Personality*, Norton, New York.

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Aesthetic labour

A term applied to jobs where the worker's appearance and personality are part of the service offered to customers. An alternative term is 'emotional labour'. Most such jobs are in consumer services – hotels, restaurants, private sector gyms, for example – where the staff are expected to use interpersonal skills to make consumers feel good, spend more and come again.

The term may also be applied to certain kinds of 'work' within the family.

See also Domestic labour.

Affect, affective

Affect is an alternative word for emotion. Affective behaviour is driven by emotion or is seeking emotional gratification.

Modern societies are believed to be different from earlier societies partly in the numerous areas of life that are affect-free and impersonal, with affectivity reserved for private life, especially life within families. Affectivity versus affective neutrality was one of the pattern variables identified by Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) to characterise and compare different cultures.

See also Parsons, T.; Pattern variables.

Affirmative action

See Positive discrimination.

Affluent society

A term that began to be applied to western societies from the 1950s onwards, when sustained economic growth was driving up living standards.

However, the term remains closely associated with the critique by John K. Galbraith (1908–2006), the distinguished American economist, who first drew attention (in the United States) to the contrast between private affluence and public squalor, and to a minority that was being left behind, excluded from all the benefits of economic growth. Many believe that his critique is as valid today as in the 1950s, and applies in more countries than ever.

Galbraith, J.K. (1958), *The Affluent Society*, Hamish Hamilton, London.

Affluent workers

This description was applied to manual workers in the 1950s (and subsequently) who were achieving year-on-year pay increases and enjoying progressively rising living standards.

There was a major debate in sociology in the 1950s and 1960s about the likely outcomes of this affluence. Supporters of an embourgeoisement thesis claimed that affluence would promote workers into the middle class,

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and that they would jettison their former working class identities, outlooks and political proclivities. The major intervention in the UK was a study of affluent workers in Luton which rejected the embourgeoisement thesis but claimed to have identified a new, privatised, instrumentally oriented section of the working class.

See also Embourgeoisement.

Goldthorpe, J.H., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F. and Platt, J. (1969), *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Ageism

A term coined by Robert Neil Butler (1927–), a US gerontologist; it refers to any stereotyping or discrimination on grounds of age. Ageism is slowly joining racism and sexism as an unacceptable form of discrimination. The victims of ageism may be old or young.

The 1967 Age Discrimination in Employment Act outlawed ageism in employment in the United States, but the Grey Panthers was formed in the early 1970s to campaign against and oppose all forms of discrimination against older persons. In Britain and the rest of the European Union age discrimination in employment, training and adult education was made illegal in 2006.

See also Racism; Sexism.

Butler, R.N. (1975, 2003), *Why Survive? Being Old in America*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Agency

This is sociology's term for individuals' (alleged) ability to think, to reflect, to interpret, to exercise choice and to act accordingly.

A major division throughout sociology's history has been between those favouring explanations in terms of agency and those favouring explanations in terms of social structure. The division became so clear that in 1971 Alan Dawe wrote about 'the two sociologies'. Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) had previously attempted to reconcile these types of explanation. Subsequently Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) and Anthony Giddens (1938–) with his concept of structuration have made further attempts.

See also Action theory; Bourdieu, P.; Giddens, A.; Parsons, T.; Structuration.

Dawe, A. (1971), 'The two sociologies', in K. Thompson and J. Tunstall (eds), *Sociological Perspectives*, Penguin, Harmondsworth.

Alienation

The literal meaning is the removal of something from someone, but Marx gave the term a more specific meaning, namely, the separation of people

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from their true nature. The most natural, basic human activity, according to Marx, was to produce for one's own needs. Under capitalism workers were said to be alienated because they did not control their own labour power (they worked to employers' instructions), nor did they own the tools that they used or the things that they produced. Feelings of self-estrangement were said to arise from this condition.

In twentieth-century sociology the objective features of the Marxist concept were stripped away in empirical studies of alienation. The American social psychologist, Melvin Seeman (1918–), operationalised alienation as feelings of powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, isolation and self-estrangement. Subsequently the sociologist Robert Blauner (1929–) used these definitions in his comparisons of alienation in different industries.

Anomie is an alternative (Durkheimian) concept that has been widely used in sociology in exploring maladies in the human condition.

See also Anomie; Blauner, R.

Blauner, R. (1964), *Alienation and Freedom*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Seeman, M. (1959), 'On the meaning of alienation', *American Sociological Review*, 24, 783–91.

Althusser, Louis (1918–1990)

A French structural Marxist, and the intellectual leader in the French Communist Party in the 1960s and 1970s.

Althusser presented a Marxist alternative to the language-based structuralism that was becoming influential in France in the 1960s, but he was equally if not more engaged in re-asserting a non-Stalinist scientific (structural) Marxism in opposition to the humanistic versions of Marxism which were then becoming ascendant.

Althusser believed that there had been a clear epistemological break in Marx's thinking after 1845. He believed that the mature Marx was a structuralist, and following in these footsteps Althusser insisted that individuals were simply bearers of social relations. However, Althusser rejected economic reductionism, and he did not believe that major historical changes and outcomes were pre-determined. He argued that politics and ideology were conditions for the very existence of the (capitalist) economy, and that historical changes occurred through the interplay of economic, political and ideological forces.

Althusser is the inventor of some terms that have been assimilated into (Marxist) sociology: over-determination, and repressive and ideological state apparatuses.

See also Ideological state apparatus; Ideology; Marx, K.; Over-determination.

Althusser, L. (1971), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New Left Books, London.

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Androcentrism 7

Androcentrism

Male bias; neglect of female contributions and perspectives.

Feminist sociologists have drawn attention to the privileging of male perspectives and experiences in politics, business and everyday social life, and also within sociology where, it is claimed, women have been subjected to 'othering' – having themselves defined by more powerful others.

See also **Feminism; Smith, D.E.; Standpoint theory.**

Androgyny

A mixture of male and female characteristics; these may be physical, psychological or cultural. Androgyny is one (of many) alternatives to patriarchy that have been recommended by feminists.

Anomie

A term introduced into sociology by Emile Durkheim (1858–1917). Anomie literally means without norms, a situation of normlessness, where there are no rules. Durkheim believed that anomie could arise through the division of labour being pushed to an excessive extreme where individuals could not recognise their interdependence, and that it could also arise in times of rapid social change – economic booms as well as recessions.

Subsequent sociologists have added to the list of conditions that can produce anomie, most notably Robert Merton (1910–2003) who argued that in modern societies there is a disjuncture between goals that all people are encouraged to strive for and the legitimate means to achieve these goals (which cannot be used successfully by everyone). Merton argued that the inevitable outcome would be one of several kinds of deviance.

Anomie has competitor sociological concepts for diagnosing society's ills: alienation for example.

See also **Alienation; Durkheim, E.; Merton, R.K.; Strain theories.**

Anthropology

The study of humans: physical anthropology studies commonalities and variations in the biological characteristics of the species; social and cultural anthropology deals with the social and cultural dimensions. British practitioners describe their discipline as social anthropology, whereas cultural anthropology is the preferred label in North America.

Anthropology grew from the curiosity of explorers, traders and missionaries who, from the fifteenth century onwards, were making contact with non-Europeans. Their work became systematised in the discipline of anthropology in the nineteenth century, at exactly the same time that sociology was emerging. Sociologists studied their own societies. Social/

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cultural anthropologists studied non-European, simpler, non-industrial societies.

By the early twentieth century armchair theorising based on reports from traders, colonial officials, missionaries and other travellers, and fieldwork based on interviews using interpreters, were being replaced by prolonged periods of observation during which investigators learnt their subjects' language and became participant observers within the societies that they were studying. Thus 'ethnography' became the characteristic research method of social and cultural anthropology.

At the time of social and cultural anthropology's emergence, a prevalent view was that the physical, psychological and social characteristics of different peoples were interdependent. Hence the development of social and cultural anthropology as branches of general anthropology. These alleged interdependences are now regarded as discredited. Furthermore, most of the simpler societies that anthropologists originally studied have become developing countries. Hence the distinction between sociology and social/cultural anthropology has collapsed except that anthropologists continue to work in the context of the bodies of knowledge and theory that anthropologists have built up, and claim special expertise in ethnography. Nowadays, however, social and cultural anthropologists are as likely to study modern as other societies.

See also **Ethnography; Participant observation.**

Apartheid

The regime of segregation by race which was implemented by South Africa's National Party from 1948 until 1994. Whites, Africans, coloureds and mixed races were separated into different kinds of employment, housing tracts, education, medical, recreation and other services. Apartheid was imposed by South Africa's whites, a minority of the population who held political and economic power. The regime made South Africa an international pariah, subject to economic and political sanctions and loss of sporting contacts. The main internal opposition to apartheid was from the African National Congress, led by Nelson Mandela (1918–), who spent 27 years in prison before being released. Mandela became South Africa's first post-apartheid elected president (1994–9).

Aristocracy

Originally a Greek concept, one of Aristotle's forms of government – by the best, in the interests of the entire community by the most virtuous citizens. The term was appropriated by the landed, titled, hereditary upper classes in pre-industrial Europe who shared (and sometimes contested) power with the monarchs.

See also **Estates; Feudalism.**

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Ascription/Ascribed status 9

Ascription/Ascribed status

See Achievement/Achieved status.

Assimilation

This is the process whereby a typically migrant or conquered group is absorbed into a dominant culture. This may be the final stage in a sequence starting with contact, progressing through conflict and competition, and then accommodation, but full assimilation may or may not be the final outcome. The sequence may stall at any intermediate stage. This will depend on the character of the cultures concerned, and the context. Note also that a dominant culture is liable to change while assimilating an initially dissimilar population.

See also **Accommodation; Acculturation; Migration.**

Asylum seekers

See Refugees.

Attitude

A psychological concept which is used extensively in sociology. An attitude is an enduring (but not necessarily totally rigid and unchangeable) tendency to perceive and/or act in a particular way towards particular persons and/or situations. Attitudes may contain cognitive (beliefs and ideas), affective (values and emotions) and behavioural (dispositions to act) dimensions.

An attitude is narrower than a personality trait. A personality may be generally sceptical. Irrespective of this, a person may be consistently sceptical towards, for example, the claims of a particular church, newspaper or political party.

Attitudes are normally measured using banks of questions which are called 'scales' because the findings enable individuals to be positioned somewhere along scales between extreme end points. The questions are usually statements with which individuals are invited to agree or disagree. Attitudes are said to be revealed if someone is consistently hostile or favourably disposed towards, for example, abortion, Europe or homosexuals.

Sociologists are interested in attitudes insofar as these personal dispositions are learnt and internalised, and characterise social groups, and therefore reflect the influence of societies and specific social milieux on the actors, and secondly insofar as attitudes explain why individuals and groups act in particular, characteristic ways in changing and possibly unpredictable and novel circumstances.

See also **Personality.**

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Authoritarian personality

A large-scale US research project following the Second World War claimed to identify a personality type that was pre-disposed to support authoritarian regimes (such as the German Nazis).

The authoritarian personality was said to be:

- extremely conformist
- submissive to authority
- rigid
- arrogant to inferiors
- prone to scapegoating (blaming ills upon vulnerable groups such as Jews and other minorities).

This personality type was said (incorporating Freudian theory) to be produced by childhood socialisation by authoritarian parents in rigid, hierarchical families. This theory, although much criticised, helped to make permissive parenting and progressive (child-centred) education fashionable in the 1950s and 1960s.

See also **Adorno, T. W.; Fascism; Fromm, E.; Marcuse, H.; Prejudice.**

Adorno, T., Frenkel-Brunswick, E., Levinson, D. and Sanford, R. (1950, 1991), *The Authoritarian Personality*, Norton, New York.

Authority

A sub-type of power, namely legitimate power, when people obey a command because they believe that they ought to do so.

Max Weber (1864–1920) famously identified three types and sources of authority:

- Tradition: when people obey because a commander has customary authority, or because a command accords with customary practice.
- Legal-rational: when people obey because a command complies with formal rules, and when the commander has been appointed through proper procedures, and is acting in accordance with the rules of his or her office (in an organisation, for example).
- Charismatic: when someone is obeyed on account of his or her extraordinary personal qualities.

See also **Charisma; Legitimacy; Power; Weber, M.**

Autopoiesis

See Luhmann, N.

Average

See Measures of central tendency.

Axiom, axiomatic 11

Axiom, axiomatic

An axiom is a taken-for-granted assumption, which may be claimed as self-evidently true. These axioms are alternatively called domain assumptions.

All arguments (within and outside sociology) rest ultimately on axioms that cannot be proven. Examples include the existence of a real world outside our own minds, and that individuals' behaviour is capable of rational explanation.

See also **Ontology; Paradigm; Problematic.**

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