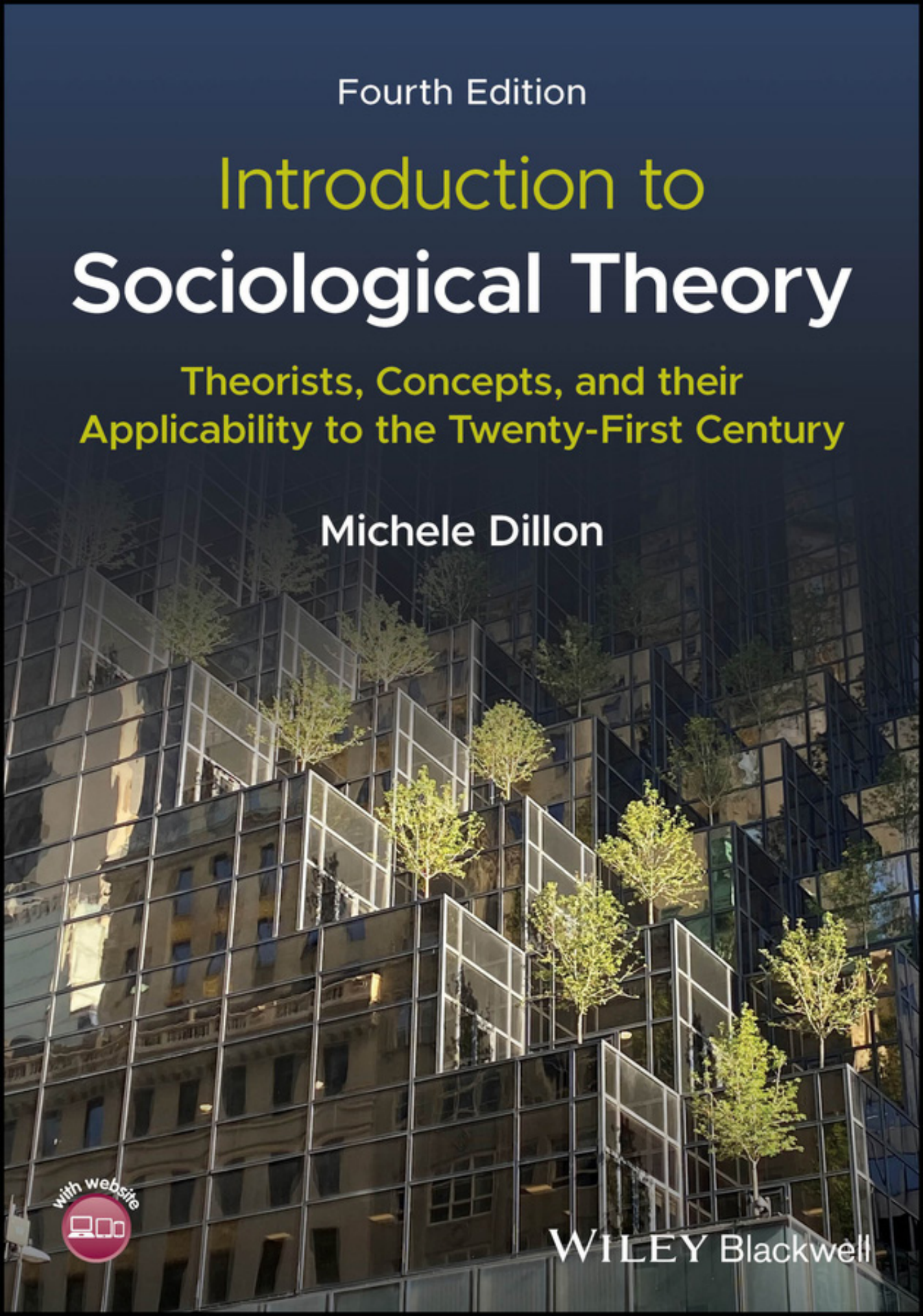
Fourth Edition

# Introduction to Sociological Theory

## Theorists, Concepts, and their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century

Michele Dillon




WILEY Blackwell

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*Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century*

FOURTH EDITION

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# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

As you read through the individual chapters in this book, you will find the following features designed to help you to develop a clear understanding of sociological theory and to apply it to everyday life.

**Key Concepts** Each chapter opens with a list of its key concepts, presented in the order in which they appear in the chapter. They are printed in blue when they first appear in the text and are defined in the glossaries at the end of each chapter and at the end of the book.

**Chapter Menu** A menu gives you the main headings of the chapter that follows.

**Biographical Note** These provide background information on the main theorists discussed in the chapter. Their names are given in bold when they first appear in the chapter.

**Theorists' Writings** Each of the first three chapters has a chronological list of the major writings of the theorists discussed: Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.

**Timelines** Where a historical framework will aid your understanding of the chapter, timelines list major events with their dates.

**Conceptual Boxes** These introduce additional theoretical ideas or summarize points relevant to the chapter.

**Contemporary Topical Applications** These features draw on information reported in the news about an event or issue that has particular salience for the concepts being discussed in the chapter. The content highlights how everyday events can be used to illustrate or probe larger social processes.

**Summary** The text of the chapter is summarized in a final paragraph or two.

**Points to Remember** These list in bullet note form the main learning points of the chapter.

**Glossary** At the end of each chapter, its key concepts are listed again, this time in alphabetical order, and defined. The glossary at the end of the book combines the end-of-chapter glossaries to define all the key concepts covered in the book.

**Questions for Review** At the end of each chapter, questions are listed that prompt you to discuss some of the overarching points of the chapter.

# ABOUT THE COMPANION WEBSITE

The *Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century* companion website contains a range of resources created by the author for instructors teaching this book in university courses. Features include:

- Instructor's manual for each chapter, including
  - Note to the Instructor
  - News Resources that can be used to stimulate classroom discussion
  - Essay Assignment Questions
  - Exam Short Answer Questions
  - Multiple-Choice Questions (and answers)
- PowerPoint teaching slides with contemporary analytical photographs and video links
- List of complementary primary readings
- Quote Bank

Instructors can access these resources at www.wiley.com/go/dillon-fourthedition

# INTRODUCTION

# SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: A VIBRANT, LIVING TRADITION

**KEY CONCEPTS**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| sociological theory | classical theory | scientific reasoning |
| concepts | canon | empiricism |
| conceptual frameworks | contemporary theory | positivist |
| pluralistic | Enlightenment | objectivity |
| macro | democracy | interpretive understanding |
| social structures | reason | emancipatory knowledge |
| micro | rationality | double-consciousness |
| culture | inalienable rights | |
| agency | utilitarianism | |

**CHAPTER MENU**




*Introduction to Sociological Theory: Theorists, Concepts, and Their Applicability to the Twenty-First Century*, Fourth Edition. Michele Dillon.



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**Timeline I.1** Major pre-Enlightenment influences and events from the Enlightenment to the establishment of sociology

| | |
|---|---|
| 500 BC–AD 999 The Classical World<br>1000–1490 The Feudal Age<br>1490–1664 The Age of Discovery | |
| 1599 | Francis Bacon, *Essays* |
| 1620 | English Pilgrims arrive at Plymouth Rock, Massachusetts |
| 1633 | Galileo summoned by the Inquisition to defend his theory that the earth moves around the sun |
| 1636 | Harvard College founded |
| 1637 | René Descartes, "I think, therefore, I am" |
| **1665–1774 The Enlightenment** | |
| 1670 | Blaise Pascal, "Man is only a reed, the weakest thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed" |
| 1687 | Isaac Newton explains laws of motion and theories of gravitation |
| 1689 | John Locke, *On Civil Government* |
| 1702 | Cambridge University establishes faculty chairs in the sciences |
| 1733 | Voltaire praises British liberalism |
| 1752 | Benjamin Franklin invents a lightning conductor; demonstrates the identity of lightning and electricity |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1762 | Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* |
| 1771 | The right to report parliamentary debates established in Britain |
| **1775–1814 The Age of Revolution** | |
| 1775 | American War of Independence; battles of Lexington and Concord (Massachusetts) |
| 1776 | British troops evacuate Boston; Declaration of Independence |
| 1776 | Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* |
| 1788 | Bread riots in France |
| 1789 | Fall of the Bastille; beginning of the French Revolution; new French Constituent Assembly abolishes feudal rights and privileges |
| 1791 | Bill of Rights in America; first 10 amendments to the US Constitution |
| 1792 | Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* |
| 1796 | Freedom of the press established in France |
| 1805 | First factory to be lit by gaslight (in Manchester, England) |
| 1807 | Air pump developed for use in mines |
| 1813 | Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* |
| 1823 | Jeremy Bentham, utilitarianism |
| 1831 | John Stuart Mill, *The Spirit of the Age* |
| 1835–1840 | Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* |
| 1837 | Harriet Martineau, *Society in America* |
| 1839 | Comte gives sociology its name |
| 1855 | Harriet Martineau translates Comte's *Positive Philosophy* |
| 1859 | Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (modern evolutionary theory) |
| 1861–1865 | American Civil War, the South (Confederates) versus the North (Union) |
| 1865 | US president Abraham Lincoln assassinated |
| 1865 | Thirteenth amendment to the US Constitution, abolishing slavery |

Welcome to **sociological theory.** Theory, by definition, is abstract. This book illustrates the richness of sociological theory by emphasizing how its breadth of **concepts** or analytical ideas have practical application and explanatory relevance to daily life. It will introduce you to the major theorists whose writings and **conceptual frameworks** inform sociological thinking. It will equip you with the theoretical vocabulary necessary to appreciate the range of perspectives found in sociological analysis. It will give you the confidence to apply these ideas to the many sociological topics you study (e.g., inequality, crime, medical sociology, race, political sociology, family, gender,

sexuality, culture, religion, community, globalization, etc.) and help you to think analytically – with a certain critical distance – about the many occurrences in daily life far beyond the classroom.

## ANALYZING EVERYDAY SOCIAL LIFE: STARBUCKS

Among many recurring news stories, the unionization of workers at Starbucks receives a lot of local and national media attention (e.g., Forbes 2022; Stack 2023). This topic, like any other that might engage you on a given day, provides a single snapshot of contemporary society, yet its various dimensions can be used to highlight the different ways that sociological theorists approach the study of society. Karl Marx (1818–1883), a towering figure in the analysis of modern capitalism (see chapter 1), would focus on the forces of economic inequality and exploitation that underlie baristas' (and other food workers') drive toward unionization. Marx's theory would highlight the extent to which within capitalism, the pursuit of profit permeates the service production process: Business owners and corporate executives, adhering to the economic logic of capitalism, develop efficient work practices that dictate how employees work, and they also determine the low wage paid for such work. Marx emphasizes that the pursuit of profit underlies and consolidates the economic or class inequality that is part and parcel of capitalism (see also Parrenas 2021; Romero 1992/2002; Sherman 2007). You might suggest that if baristas are unhappy, they should leave Starbucks. But if they leave, what are their options? Very limited, Marx would respond. Because baristas (and other workers) have to live, they need money in order to survive (especially in a society in which there is very little government economic support available to those who are on low-wages or unemployed long term). Therefore, although baristas and other restaurant servers are free to leave a particular employer, they are not free to withhold labor from every coffee shop or restaurant – they must work someplace. Hence wage-workers must sell their labor on the job market, even if what they receive in exchange for their labor will always be significantly less than the profit that Starbucks or some other employer will make from their work. Although Starbucks must pay the many costs associated with the coffee retail business and the upkeep and running of its more than 9,000 company-owned stores in the United States, a large gap will also remain between the baristas' minimum wage (a high of $15 an hour in New York City) and the accumulated money paid by Starbucks' customers for lattes across a single hour of service.

Further, the competitive nature of capitalism and the economic competition among coffee shops and restaurants means that the profit-driven working conditions in one specific workplace will not vary much from those in another. Low wages and irregular work schedules, therefore, are what baristas and servers can expect, regardless of the specific employer (whether Starbucks, Caffe Nero, or a locally owned coffee shop). Moreover, if baristas fail to show up for work or are slow in doing their tasks, they can be fired and there will always be others waiting to take their place; one of the effects of globalization (discussed in chapter 14) is to increase the competition between low-wage workers whose pool is expanded by the increasing numbers of immigrant and migrant workers available to the low-paying service industries (e.g., Chen 2015; Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2002; Sassen 2007).

In focusing on the profit logic and unequal economic relations within capitalist society – basically the world at large – Marx also alerts us to how ideology, that is, our taken-for-granted ideas about work, achievement, freedom, consumption, luxury, etc., determines how we explain and justify all sorts of social phenomena, whether social inequality, the Olympic Games, or the latest consumer fad. Marx – and subsequent theorists influenced partly by Marx, such as Critical Theorists (see chapter 5) – would argue that the ideology of freedom – typically used to denote political freedom and democracy – has in today's world become the freedom to shop. We all (more or less) want the consumer lifestyle and the freedom of choice embodied by the array of regular and specialty coffees available at Starbucks, a pursuit promoted by the (globalizing) capitalist class, and especially by advertising, social media (our and our friends' Instagram-able experiences), and the fashion and pop culture industries. We are continuously exposed to messages celebrating consumption and the good life. Indeed, Marx would argue that it is largely because baristas and servers (and not just affluent customers) buy into the allure of consumption that they consent to work as hard as they do, despite dissatisfaction with their working conditions, and without fully realizing or acknowledging the wholesale inequality of the capitalist system with its ever-growing gap between the rich and the poor.

Max Weber (1864–1920) (his last name is pronounced *vayber*), also offers an analysis of modern capitalism. But unlike Marx, he orients us to the broad range of forces driving social behavior and the various subjective motivations and meanings that lead social actors – either individually, or collectively as workers, corporations, trade unions, universities, religious organizations, nation states, or transnational alliances (e.g., the European Union [EU]) – to behave as they do (see chapter 3). Like Marx, he highlights the centrality of strategic cost–benefit or instrumental interests. Thus baristas, unions, and Starbucks' and other corporate executives pursue their own economic and political interests by making rational, cost–benefit assessments of which courses of action are the most expedient given their respective goals. Starbucks executives are suspicious of the union's goals beyond the specific issues of wages and benefits: They are concerned that Starbucks' strategic interests (in making money, hiring workers, and competing with other coffee businesses) will be undermined if their work force is unionized. And union leaders are concerned about the relevance of unions if nonunionized workers can garner a good wage deal without the union's intervention. Not surprisingly, as some contemporary theorists highlight (e.g., Ralph Dahrendorf; see chapter 6), intergroup conflict is common in democratic societies as various economic and other interest groups compete for greater recognition of their respective agendas.

Life, however, is not all about economic and strategic interests. One of Weber's theoretical achievements was to demonstrate that values and beliefs also matter. Values guide social action, a point subsequently emphasized by Talcott Parsons, an American theorist who was highly influential from the 1940s to the 1980s in shaping sociological thinking and research (see chapter 4). Individuals, groups, organizations, and whole countries are motivated by values – by commitments to particular understandings of friendship, family, patriotism, environmental sustainability, education, religion, etc. Subjective values, such as commitment to securing a college education for themselves with their earned wages (and support from the college-education benefit Starbucks provides to some employees), may explain why baristas work as hard as they do.

Commitment to family and to providing for one's children is also a significant motivator; indeed, many immigrant women leave their children and families in their home country while they work abroad, earning money to send home so their children can have a more economically secure life (e.g., England 2005; Sassen 2007). The strong cultural value of individualism in the United States, for example, also helps to explain why labor unions have a much harder time gaining members and wielding influence in the United States than in Western European countries such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and France. The historical–cultural influence of Protestantism in the United States and its emphasis on self-reliance and individual responsibility (also studied by Weber) means that many Americans believe that being poor is largely an individual's own responsibility (and a sign of moral weakness), a belief that impedes the expansion of state-subsidized housing, employment, and social welfare programs. (On the underlying institutional and cultural factors driving poverty in the United States, see Desmond [2023]).

As recognized by both Marx and Weber, differences in economic resources are a major source of inequality (or stratification), determining individuals' and groups' rankings relative to one another (e.g., upper-class, middle-class, and lower-class strata). Additionally, Weber, unlike Marx, argues that social inequality is not only based on differences in income but also associated with differences in lifestyle or social status. Weber and contemporary theorists influenced by his conceptualization of the multiple sources of inequality – such as Pierre Bourdieu (see chapter 13) – argue that individuals and groups acquire habits that demonstrate and solidify social class differences. Such differences are evident not only between the upper and lower classes but also between those who are economically adjacent. This helps to explain why some people prefer Starbucks over Dunkin Donuts and why some will only buy coffee from a local café promoting fair trade certification. For similar status reasons, some women will spend hundreds of dollars on a Louis Vuitton handbag rather than buy a cheaper, though equally functional one by Coach.

The cultural goals (e.g., consumption, economic success, and upward mobility) affirmed in society, however, are not always readily attainable. Children who grow up in poor neighborhoods with underfunded schools are disadvantaged by their limited access to the social institutions (e.g., school) that provide the culturally approved means or pathways to academic, occupational, and economic success (e.g., MacLeod 2008). As the American sociologist Robert Merton (see chapter 4) shows, society creates deviance (e.g., stealing) as a result of the mismatch between cultural goals (e.g., consumer lifestyle) and blocked access to the acceptable institutional means to attain those goals.

Deviance is a social fact and is "normal" – as classical theorist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917) emphasizes. It is normal because it comes from society and exists in all societies as indicated by crime rates. Yet "too much" deviance (or crime) may threaten the social order. Social order and cohesion are Durkheim's overarching focus (see chapter 2). He is basically interested in what knits society together – what binds individuals into society. Rather than focusing on what Marx, for example, would see as employers' exploitation of employees, Durkheim highlights the social interdependence produced. For Durkheim, cafe owners, workers, customers, and unions are all interdependent elements of the social collectivity, a collectivity whose effective functioning is