

CHAPTER 1

In the Beginning There Was Modernity

The Making of Modernity

Modernity's Two Projects

America and the First Sociologists

Democratic Institutions

Education

Theory and Its Place in Modernity

Building Your Theory Toolbox

This is, of course, a text about contemporary social and sociological theory. However, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to understand contemporary theory without first understanding modernity and the conditions under which the social disciplines were founded. The words *modern* and *modernity* are used in a number of different ways. Sometimes *modern* is used in the same way as *contemporary* or *up-to-date*. Other times it's used as an adjective, as in modern art or modern architecture. In the social disciplines, there has been a good bit of debate about the idea of modernity. Some argue that we are no longer modern, others that we never were, and still others that we are living in some different form of modernity, like liquid modernity. We're not going to enter into this debate directly; but the existence of the debate is important for us. The reason it's important is that this debate has implications for the kind of person we can be and the kind of society we can have. Whether we realize it or not, those are the very issues that sociology addresses.

In this book, we're going to begin thinking about society and our place in it using a specific view of modernity, one that assumes a rational actor and an ordered world that can be directed. It's important to note that this approach to understanding modernity and knowledge is just one of many possibilities. So, this story

of modernity is simply our beginning; it's our touchstone, the place from which to organize our thinking. As you move through the book, you'll find that many contemporary theorists point to social factors and processes that make it difficult to be a reasoned social actor. There are also theories that indicate that the social world may not be ordered, but rather, is a kind of chaotic system. And, more fundamentally, the social world may not be objective, but may simply be a subjective attribution of meaning. Further, some critical theorists argue that this idea of modern knowledge is intrinsically linked to power and is thus oppressive. That's why we are starting with this view of modernity and modern knowledge: It's the ideal, and it's the one that many people assume to be alive and well in modern democracy.

The Making of Modernity

As a historical period, *modernity* began in the seventeenth century and was marked by significant social changes, such as massive movements of populations from small local communities to large urban settings, a high division of labor, high commodification and use of rational markets, the widespread use of bureaucracy, and large-scale integration through national identities—such as “American”—to unite differences like gender, race, religion, and so forth. In general, the defining institutions of modernity are nation-states and mass democracy, capitalism, science, and mass media; the historical moments that set the stage for modernity are the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Reformation, the American and French Revolutions, and the Industrial Revolution.

But modernity is more than a period of time; it's a way of knowing that is rooted in the Enlightenment and positivism. The Enlightenment was a European intellectual movement that began around the time Sir Isaac Newton published *Principia Mathematica* in 1686, though the beginnings go back to Bacon, Hobbes, and Descartes. The people creating this intellectual revolution felt that the use of reason and logic would enlighten the world in ways that fate and faith could not. The principal targets of this movement were the Church and the monarchy, and the ideas central to the Enlightenment were progress, empiricism, freedom, and tolerance.

The ideas of *progress* and *empiricism* are especially significant. Prior to the Enlightenment, the idea of progress wasn't important. The reason for this is that the dominant worldview had its basis in tradition and religion. Traditional knowledge is by definition embedded in long periods of time and thus resists change and progress. Religion is based upon revelation, which, again by definition, makes our learning about the world dependent upon God's disclosure and not upon us developing or advancing it. In order for the modern idea of progress to make sense, the universe had to be seen in a specific light. Rather than the world being a mix of the physical and the spiritual, as with religion or magic, it had to be understood as simply empirical, and our knowing of this world dependent upon our own efforts, our own observations using our five senses, and our own gathering of evidence. Traditional knowledge is valid if it stands the test of time; religious knowledge is valid if it is revealed by God; but modern knowledge is valid if and only if it is empirically tested and works.

The idea of progress is also tied up with what's called *positivism*. The basic tenet of positivism is that theology and metaphysics are imperfect ways of knowing and that positive knowledge is based upon facts and universal laws. The ideal model for positivistic knowledge is science: *Science* assumes the universe is empirical, that it operates according to law-like principles, and that human beings can discover these laws. Further, the reasons to discover these laws are to explain, predict, and control phenomena for the benefit of humankind. Scientific knowledge is built up or accumulated as theories are tested and the untenable parts discarded. New theories are built up from the previous and those in turn are tested, and so on. It's essential for you to note that this business of testing is one characteristic that separates positivistic knowledge from all previous forms: *The basis of accepting knowledge isn't faith but doubt*. It's this characteristic of positivistic knowledge that gives progress its modern meaning.

Modernity's Two Projects

Progress in modernity—and thus the intent of modern knowledge—is focused on two main arenas: technical and social. The *technical project* of modernity is generally the domain of science. In science, knowledge is used to control the universe through technology. While we've come to see science as the bastion for the technical project of modernity, the responsibility for the *social project* is seemingly less focused, at least in our minds today. Generally speaking, the institutional responsibility for the social project rests with the democratic state. Prior to Western modernity, the primary form of government in Europe was feudalism, which was based on land tenure and personal relationships. These relationships, and thus the land, were organized around the monarchy with clear social, hereditary divisions between royalty and peasants. Therefore, the experience of the everyday person in feudal Europe was one where personal obligations and one's relationship to the land were paramount. Every person was keenly aware of his or her obligations to the lord of the land. These were seen as a kind of familial relationship, with fidelity as its chief goal. The main type of political identity available in feudalism was the subject—subjects are placed under the authority, control, or dominion of the monarchy.

Modern democracy began with the American and French Revolutions. The U.S. Declaration of Independence captures this new type of government: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The social project of modernity, then, was founded on the belief in natural, human rights—rights that cannot be given to people by a government because they belong to every person by birth. A necessary implication of this belief is that government can rule only by consent of the governed; that is, modern government can rule only through democracy.

While the main identity available in feudalism was the subject, in a modern democracy it is the citizen. It's important for you to see the connection between modern knowledge and citizenship. Both science and citizenship are based on the idea of a new kind of person—the supreme individual with the power to use his or

her own mind to determine truth and to use reason to discover the world as it exists and make rational decisions. This belief gave the Enlightenment its other name: the Age of Reason. This new idea, this reasoning person, obviously formed the basis of scientific inquiry; more importantly, for our purposes, it also formed the basis for the social project. Democracy is not only possible because of belief in the rational individual; this new person also necessitates democracy. The only way of governing a group of individuals, each of whom is capable of rational inquiry and reasonable action, is through their consent.

America and the First Sociologists

Sociology was and continues to be one of the best disciplines for inquiry into modernity's social goals, precisely because it is the study of society. The first sociologists did not hold PhD's, nor did they go to school to study sociology. They were generally found among the "thousands of 'travelers,' . . . who came to [the United States] to observe how the new revolutionary system worked" (Lipset, 1962, p. 5). In the beginning phases of modernity, the United States was seen as the first and purest experiment in democracy. Unlike Europe, where modern government had to contend with and emerge from feudalism, America was born in democracy. People thus came to the United States not only to experience freedom, but also to observe how modern democracy worked.

Three of these early sociologists were Alexis de Tocqueville, Harriet Martineau, and Jane Addams. Tocqueville was French and lived from 1805 to 1859. His best-known work is *Democracy in America*, a two-volume investigation of the United States published in 1835 and 1840. Harriet Martineau was British, lived from 1802 to 1876, and is well-known for several works. The first is her translation of Auguste Comte's *Positive Philosophy*, one of the foundation stones of science in general and sociology specifically—Comte is usually seen as the founder of sociology. Another of Martineau's important works is *How to Observe Morals and Manners*, published in 1838. The work was quite probably the first methodology book for the social sciences. It's important to note that this book is addressed to "travelers" and "tourists." Remember, modernity brought rapid increases in transportation and communication technologies; people were thus able to move about the globe in a way that was never before possible. Moreover, they were challenged and excited by the new idea of knowledge that modernity brought. Many thus set out to discover society, just as the founders of science did with the physical world.

Martineau wrote her methodology book because she was concerned: People were making observations of society haphazardly and were reaching conclusions with bias and with too little research. To make her point, Martineau (1838/2003) asks the traveler if he or she would feel confident to answer if someone were to ask about the "geology of Corsica, or the public buildings of Palermo" (p. 14). She then takes the part of the traveler and answers this rhetorical question herself with, "Oh, I can tell you nothing about that—I never studied geology; I know nothing about architecture" (p. 14).

Please notice clearly what Martineau is saying: People can and should observe, investigate, and discover society. But we cannot and should not take this endeavor lightly. Yes, everybody can observe, but everybody needs to be prepared: “Of all the sciences . . . [the study of society is] the most difficult in its application” (p. 15). Martineau wrote *How to Observe Morals and Manners* on her voyage to the United States, where she collected data for her subsequent three-volume work, *Society in America*, published in 1837. These two books obviously go hand in hand: *Morals and Manners* contains the methodology Martineau used to study American democracy. Martineau’s basic method was to compare what America said it was going to do (morals) with what it was actually doing (manners). Today, the title might be *Ethics and Practices*. Thus, Martineau very clearly saw the American experiment as an ethical, moral issue. In her mind, then, the ethics of democracy are the most important causal—practices should flow from ethics.

Martineau isn’t alone among early sociologists in seeing this connection. Jane Addams (1860–1935), the first American woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (1931), also understood this central issue. In the introduction to her book *Democracy and Social Ethics*, Addams (1902/2002) says, “It is well to remind ourselves . . . that ‘Ethics’ is but another word for ‘righteousness,’ that for which many men and women of every generation have hungered and thirsted, and without which life becomes meaningless” (p. 5). Further, Addams sees democracy not “merely as a sentiment which desires the well-being of all men, nor yet as a creed which believes in the essential dignity and equality of all men, but as that which affords a rule of living as well as a test of faith” (p. 7).

As these early sociologists saw it, there are certain assumed practices that come with democracy. Two of the most important practices and ideas involve the association of the individual with the collective and emergent ethics. Something is said to emerge if it rises from or comes out of something else, as steam emerges out of water and heat. In this case, the ethical practices of democracy arise from specific kinds of associations between the individual and the living collective. In this way, democracy is intrinsically open-ended. It’s an emergent, ongoing project. American democracy as it is set forth in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights explicitly structures the system in this way. That’s the reason why freedom of the press, freedom of speech, and the freedom to gather are among the rights of citizens.

Ethics and morality are thus social rather than individual and come out of experience, experimentation, and diversity. Addams (1902/2002) specifically argues that democratic citizens are morally obligated to seek out interactions with people *unlike themselves*, because truly democratic ideals and practices cannot come out of interactions within a homogeneous group. This is a law of people and culture: Patterned and repeated interactions among individuals will create and sustain similar and particularized cultural beliefs. Democracy, which is fundamentally concerned with bringing freedom and equality to all humankind, must then seek diverse people and diverse interactions, out of which will come what Tocqueville calls the moral majority.

Tocqueville’s emphasis is on the morality inherent in the democratic process of the majority. The belief in back of this is the idea that “there is more enlightenment

and wisdom in a numerous assembly than in a single man” (Tocqueville, 1835/1969, p. 247). The emphasis here is on diversity of thought. It is, as Tocqueville says, “the theory of equality applied to brains” (p. 247). The morality of the majority isn’t found in a homogeneous belief system—quite the opposite. The moral majority is found when the greater part of the citizenry come together for political discourse where diverse ideas can clash and where reason can create consensus. Modern morality, then, isn’t a static belief system; modern morality is the ongoing and public meeting of the minds of the majority of people. As Jane Addams (1902/2002) puts it, “Unless all men and all classes contribute to a good, we cannot even be sure it is worth having” (p. 97).

Democratic Institutions

Modernity also brought with it new institutions and new institutional arrangements. In premodern society, social institutions overlapped quite a bit. One of the most important overlaps was between religion and government. In feudalistic Europe, for example, the right of kings to rule was legitimized by religion, and second and third sons of royalty were often trained clergymen. If we look back further in history, we can see that in almost every society, religion and government overlapped and legitimated one another.

Modernity, then, is unique in that it intentionally separates church and state. This separation is necessary because democracy cannot function under absolute truth and **legitimation**. Theocracy is the polar opposite of democracy. In a theocracy, the power to rule comes from the top (God) down; in a democracy, the power to rule goes from the bottom (citizens) up. However, it’s also clear by looking at early social thinkers and sociologists that this separation did not necessarily mean that religion wasn’t important or would go away.

Another important institution for modernity is capitalism. Prior to modern capitalism social position was determined by and large by birth. One could not, for example, aspire to be king if born a commoner—political position was determined by family. The economy was just as fixed as the political system. Generally speaking, the only time one could move up to a craft position was if there were no children born to the master craftsman. And while there was buying and selling, there was no structural mechanism for entrepreneurship as there is today. Capitalism was meant to be a way through which every man (and it was only men) could stand upon their own talents and effort. We’ll consider this institution in later in the book. But because of its relationship to modern knowledge and modernity, I want to turn to the place education was to hold.

Education

One of the central institutions in both the technical and social projects is education (which just so happens to be the institution you’re in right now). Martineau (1838/2003) argues that in the history of humankind there are two great social

powers—force and knowledge—and the story of human progress is the movement away from one and toward the other. Social relations began through physical force and domination and the idea that might makes right. Knowledge, as we understand it today, was of little worth. Rather, what was important in terms of knowledge was tradition. In such societies, the past is everything. Thus, by definition traditional authority isn't critically examined and maintains the status quo; it "falls back upon precedent, and reposes there" (p. 45).

Modern knowledge, as we've seen, is clearly different. It values reason, progress, and change. The important point here is that Martineau sees a clear link between modern knowledge and government. Power in a modern state rests upon the people. The method through which democratic citizens are to exercise their power is through knowledge, which is why education is a keystone for modernity. Tocqueville (1835/1969) likewise sees education as the foundation of democracy: "The first duty imposed on those who now direct society is to educate democracy" (p. 12). And Jane Addams (1902/2002) tells us that democracy is based on belief in the power residing in each one of us and that it is education that will unlock that potential: "We are impatient to use the dynamic power residing in the mass of men, and demand that the educator free that power" (p. 80).

Martineau (1838/2003) argues that two of the most important indicators of the relationship between education and freedom are the extent of free education and the position of the university. The extent of free education is an unmistakable measure of its support of the ideas of equality and democracy. In modern countries, education is perceived as the legitimate way to get ahead. In other words, the kind of job and pay you get is initially based on your level of education. Martineau is saying that to understand the level of equality that society supports, one need only look at the kinds of job opportunities that free, public education provides. For example, if a society supports public education only through high school, it indicates that the level of equality the state is interested in supporting is only equal to the jobs that require a high school education.

On this point, Martineau's indictment of America is clear. While our moral says that we believe in equality of opportunity for all people, our manners (practices) say different. While Tocqueville's (1835/1969) focus isn't the same as Martineau's, his criticism is identical:

I think there is no other country in the world where, proportionately to population, there are so few ignorant and so few learned individuals as in America. Primary education is within reach of all; higher education is hardly available to anybody. (p. 55)

The second indicator of the place of education in society is the regard given the university. Martineau (1838/2003) claims that "in countries where there is any popular Idea of Liberty, the universities are considered its stronghold" (p. 203). The reason for this link between liberty and universities is precisely the connection that was made earlier: Democratic citizens are morally obligated to continually examine the state in terms of its progress in fulfilling the social goals of modernity. And this

examination is to be insistent, assertive, and uncompromising. As Martineau puts it, “It would be an interesting inquiry how many revolutions warlike and bloodless, have issued from seats of learning” (p. 203).

Not only are the purpose, content, and environment of the university important, but so are its students, in particular their motivation for study. To the degree that students are motivated to obtain a university education for a job, to that degree is education for freedom compromised. Martineau (1838/2003) makes a comparison between students in Germany and those in the United States. German students are noted for their quest for knowledge: The German student may “remain within the walls of his college till time silvers his hairs.” The young American student, on the other hand, “satisfied at the end of three years that he knows as much as his neighbors . . . plunges into what alone he considers the business of life” (p. 205). Obviously, in advanced capitalist society, getting a college education is important for economic success. But seeing and using education *primarily* as a method of credentialing and job placement sounds the death knell for democracy.

Theory and Its Place in Modernity

Theory is at the heart of modern knowledge and science—theory is the basis of modern control—and, most of your classes, whether it was explicit or not, are based on theoretical understandings. Yet there’s a line in pop culture that says, “It’s only a theory.” The truth of the matter is that apart from tradition and religion, theory is all we have. All scientific work is based on theory—science and technology in all its forms would not exist if it wasn’t for theory. Theories aren’t accepted on faith, nor are they time honored. In fact, the business of science is the continual attempt to disprove theories! Theories are accepted because they have stood up to the constant doubt and battering of scientists. Furthermore, “facts” are actually a function of theory: Scientific data are produced through testing and using theoretical perspectives and hypotheses. So, having “just a theory” is a powerful thing.

The first and most important function of theory is that it explains how something works or comes into existence—*theory* is a logically formed argument that explains an empirical phenomenon in general terms. I came across two statements that help illustrate this point. A recent issue of *Discover* magazine contained the following statement: “Iron deficiency, in particular, can induce strange tastes, though it’s not known why” (Kagan, 2008, p. 16). There are many of these empirical observations in science and medicine. For example, it’s not known why some people get motion sickness and others don’t, nor is it known why more women than men get Raynaud’s disease. Observations like these that simply link two empirical variables together are not theoretical.

The second statement appeared in an article about how exercise improves memory and may delay the onset of Alzheimer’s. In linking these variables, the article says, “It works like this: aerobic exercise increases blood flow to the brain, which nourishes brain cells and allows them to function more effectively”

(Redford & Kinoshian, 2008, p. 26). Unlike the first statement, this one offers an explanation of how things work. This, then, is a theoretical statement. It describes how the empirical association between exercise and improved memory works. This function of theory is extremely important, especially for civic sociology. So in studying theory, always look for factors that, when connected, explain how something works or exists.

Theory is built out of assumptions, perspectives, concepts, definitions, and relationships. Our word *perspective* comes from the Latin *perspectus* and it literally means “to look through.” Perspectives act like glasses—they bring certain things into focus and blur our vision to others. *Perspectives* thus determine what we see. Joel Charon (2001) explains it this way:

Perspectives sensitize the individual to see parts of reality, they desensitize the individual to other parts, and they guide the individual to make sense of the reality to which he or she is sensitized. Seen in this light, a perspective is an absolutely basic part of everyone’s existence, and it acts as a filter through which everything around us is perceived and interpreted. There is no possible way that the individual can encounter reality “in the raw,” directly, as it really is, for whatever is seen can be only part of the real situation. (p. 3)

In other words, we never directly experience the world; we encounter it through our perspectives. For a trained sociologist, every theory is based on a perspective, it is a way of seeing and not seeing the world.

All perspectives are built upon *assumptions*—things that we suppose to be true without testing them. There’s an old saying that goes like this: When you assume, you make an Ass out of U and Me. That saying is dead wrong. Human beings can’t begin to think, let alone act, without making assumptions. What makes an ass out of you and me is when we don’t acknowledge and critically examine the assumptions underlying our knowledge and actions.

There are three basic assumptions used in social theory: assumptions about human nature, the existence of society, and the purposes and goals of knowledge. Human nature may be seen as utterly social or egoistic, symbolic and flexible or genetically determined, rational or emotional, freely acting or determined, and so on. While there are a number of variations, the basic assumption about society is whether or not it exists objectively—as something that can act independently of the individuals that make it up. At one end of this continuum are those who assume that social structures are objective and strongly influence (or cause) human behavior. Theory that is based on this assumption seeks to explain and predict the effects of social processes using law-like principles. At the other end of the continuum are those who argue that society does not exist objectively outside of human interpretation and action. These kinds of theories don’t try to predict human action at all; instead, they seek to understand and explain contextual social action. The assumption about purpose involves the value or ethics of theory and sociological work. At one end of this continuum are those who believe sociology should be value-free and only explain what exists. This is the ideal of science—knowledge for knowledge’s

sake. At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe the purpose of theory and sociological work is to critique society and bring about change.

The *concepts* that theory uses are abstract. The reason for this is that abstract concepts give us explanatory power. For example, in one of Karl Marx's writings he talks about "the discovery of America" and how it gave impetus to the world market. That idea of Marx's can only be used to explain one empirical event. However, if we can see what happened in more abstract terms, we can explain more than one situation. In this case we could substitute "geographic expansion" and the theory would have more explanatory power. The problem with abstract concepts is that they are indefinite, which is why definitions are so important.

Let's use a common table as an example. Any specific table is there for everyone to see and touch. We can assess it using a standard of measurement. So, we can say, "That table is 48 by 24 inches." (Of course, it changes to 121.92 by 60.96 centimeters if we use the metric system.) But a definition of *table* must be general enough to be used to classify all tables, not just this one. Definitions describe ideas and concepts. How, then, do we know where the idea or category of table begins and ends? The only way to limit the idea of table is to specify it through a definition.

If I ask you to give me a definition for table, you might say something like, "A table is a wooden structure that has four legs." But is that general enough? No. Don't we call some metal things tables as well? And some things that count as tables have three rather than four legs. So, you might then say, "A table is a structure made out of any material that has three or more legs that has a flat surface upon which we can place objects." That's better, but is it good enough? Maybe, but this definition could also apply to chairs as well as tables. Obviously, we aren't usually that concerned about the definition of table. We all know what a table is, at least within practical limits, which is all we're really concerned with in everyday life. But I hope you can see the issue for critical thinking and theory: If all we have to build arguments and theory out of are concepts, then definitions become extremely important. They are the basic fodder for critical thinking and are the fundamental building blocks of theory and arguments.

Strong definitions will go beyond a simple description and will explain the conditions necessary for belonging to the concept/class being defined. We were working toward this kind of stipulative definition in our discussion of table. In our definitions, we want to fully explain the qualities that make something what it is and not something else. *Merriam-Webster's* (2002) defines table as "a piece of furniture consisting of a smooth flat slab fixed on legs or other support and variously used (as for eating, writing, working, or playing games)." That strikes me as a fairly good definition. It's general enough to include tables with three, four, six, or eight legs, yet specific enough to exclude other similar objects like chairs (tables are used for "eating, writing, working, or playing games")—the definition *stipulates* the necessary conditions for a thing to be considered a table.

Theories also need to explain the relationships among the concepts. Keep this in mind: Theoretical concepts do work and it's the relationships that explain how they work. There are at least two concerns in spelling out theoretical relationships.

The first is the direction of the relationship. There are two basic possibilities, positive and negative. A relationship is positive if the concepts vary in the same direction (either both increase or both decrease); relationships are negative if they vary in opposite directions (if one increases, the other decreases). Let's use a simple example—education and occupation. The relationship between these two concepts is positive (at least, that's your working hypothesis for being in school): Increasing years of education will produce higher-rated jobs for the individual. Notice that because the relationship is positive, it works the same in reverse: Lower years of education produce lower-rated jobs.

The second concern with relationships is more difficult: We need to explain the relationship. More years of education might equate to a better job, but how does that work? If you think about this a moment, you'll see that the theoretical task just grew tremendously. What is it about education that would affect jobs in that way? How does this relationship work? Historically, it wasn't always true that formal education and occupation were related. Why are they now? Many people in our society know that higher levels of education lead to better jobs, but most can't explain how that works. When you can do that, you're beginning to form authoritative opinions.

But theory can and should do more. Theory should inspire and give insight; it should make us see things we wouldn't otherwise. For example, when Marx says that capitalism breeds its own gravediggers, we see something that isn't possible when giving a technical explanation of the material dialectic. Or, when Durkheim says that the collective consciousness is so independent that it will often do things for its own amusement, our mind is captured in such a way that a technical explanation of social facts can't match. The same is true with Habermas' colonization of the lifeworld, or the idea that money is a pimp, or the notion of plastic sexuality, and many others. It's important to see that this function of theory isn't simply a matter of "turning a phrase." These kinds of theoretical statements get at the essence—they help us see into the core of a social factor or process. Both functions of theory are important, but they can easily overshadow one another. Theory should thus explain how something works or came about as well as inspire us to insight.

One of the things I hope you take from this discussion is that your education in social and sociological theory isn't insignificant. It is an intrinsic part of what we mean when we talk about modernity and democracy. Yet at the same time I've set up an ideal modernity. Through our journey together we'll see that some of the ideals are substantiated in the theories we consider, but we'll also see that many are challenged. There are problems with the ideal of equality, and in Chapters 7 and 8 we specifically look at the challenges of race, gender, and class. There are also challenges to the ideals of scientific knowledge; we'll specifically see those in Chapters 13, 14, and 16. But we'll also see that some reaffirm the ideals and hold great hope for our future. Others find our future tenuous, but filled with possibilities yet unknown. The journey through contemporary theory is exciting—a roller coaster, to use Anthony Giddens (Chapter 12) imagery. But to take this journey we have to start here, firmly grounded in modernity, its vision, and most importantly its way of knowing.

BUILDING YOUR THEORY TOOLBOX

At the end of every chapter, I will be giving you exercises and projects. These activities are designed to help you understand and use the theories you've learned. The intent of these first two chapters is to provide you with a background for the rest of the book. I am thus keeping these toolboxes brief. The most important things I want you to take away from these two chapters are ideas that you can use to think through and analyze the theories that follow.

- Please define the following terms. Make your definitions as theoretically robust as possible (don't be afraid to consult other sources). You want these definitions to work for you throughout the book: *modernity, progress, empiricism, positivism, science, technical project, social project, democracy, perspectives, theoretical definitions*
- Please answer the following questions:
 - Explain the projects of modernity and how science as a knowledge system fits in.
 - Describe the work of the first sociologists. What were their concerns? How do you think sociology fits into the projects of modernity?
 - Explain the institutional arrangements that are supposed to be most conducive to democracy.
 - Define theory. In your definition be certain to explain the purpose, building blocks, and goals of theory.
 - What are the three assumptions sociologists usually make? Describe each assumption and why it is important in the work of theory.