



# GLOSSARY

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## **action**

In interpretive sociology, the term that stresses the consciously intended nature of human social behaviour.

## **action theory/ interpretive theory**

Approaches to human social behaviour that explain it as the product of the choices and intentions of actors, such as Weber's social action theory, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and ethnomethodology. Social life is seen as the creation or accomplishment of conscious human beings whose mental abilities to interpret or attach meaning to reality enable them to make sense of each other and thereby interact in ordered ways.

## **agency**

The term favoured by Giddens and his followers to refer to purposive, intentional action. Probably used more often than action today.

## **alienation**

A crucial concept in Marxist thinking, just as anomie is in Durkheimian thought. It summarizes the nature of existence for a member of an exploited class. Forced to work for someone else in order to live, such a worker not only has little or no control over how this work is carried out but does not own what it produces either. Such workers are alienated from both work itself and its product.

## **anatomo-politics**

A Foucauldian term which refers to the exercise of power in order to encourage people to think about and manage their bodies in particular ways.



<b>anomie</b>	Durkheim's term for egoistic, self-centred, anti-social behaviour, which, for him, is always the result of inappropriate or inadequate socialization.
<b>belief system</b>	A set of interrelated ideas which together form a coherent view of the world.
<b>bio-medicine</b>	The approach to health and illness which treats these as matters essentially to do with the body and its constituent organs.
<b>bio-politics</b>	A Foucauldian term which refers to the exercise of power in order to promote particular forms of physical behaviour in a population of bodies.
<b>bourgeoisie</b>	The Marxist term for the owners of productive wealth in capitalism: employers, shareholders and investors.
<b>capitalism</b>	The hiring of workers to produce goods and services for sale in order to make a profit for their employers.
<b>class consciousness</b>	According to Marx, only the overthrow of false consciousness will make the dominated, exploited class aware of their true, collective circumstances. Only then will they become conscious of their class identity and the need to take action as a class if they are to become free.
<b>cognitive relativism</b>	The view that all factual knowledge, such as that produced by science, is a cultural construction and therefore can never be held to be objectively correct.
<b>collective conscience</b>	A crucial pre-condition for social solidarity, Durkheim's term for the sharing of beliefs, judgements and world-views and, as a result, the fostering of a sense of a shared identity among a population of different individuals. According to Durkheim, the principal function of religion is the vital one of generating and fostering a collective conscience.
<b>compulsory heterosexuality</b>	The term employed by Adrienne Rich to describe the cultural privileging of male-female sexual relations over all others and the resulting conviction that the only normal and natural source of sexual fulfilment is derived from penile-vaginal penetrative sex.
<b>consumption</b>	The activity of purchasing goods for personal use, as in shopping.



**depersonalization/  
mortification of  
the self**

According to Goffman, these are the principal consequences of institutionalization. The terms refer to the way the enforcement of organizational rules reduces the capacity of humans to choose who to be and to decide for themselves how to behave.

**discourse (1)**

The particular words chosen in order to express meaning.

**discourse (2)**

A depiction of reality and a set of prescriptions for behaviour based on a particular form of knowledge, as in medical discourse, religious discourse.

**disenchantment/  
dehumanization**

According to Weber, the huge drawback of the dominance of rationalization in modernity. For him, the obsession with efficiency and calculability which typifies modern existence results in the absence of any real interest in the finer things in life – spiritual, emotional and aesthetic considerations in particular.

**division of labour**

Durkheim's term for the extent to which members of a society play different roles and live different lives. The more traditional a society, the simpler the division of labour; the more modern it is, the more complex the division of labour.

**economism/  
economic  
determinism**

Usually used pejoratively (as a criticism), these terms refer to an analysis that sees economic activity as the only area of human life that needs to be understood in order to make sense of human behaviour.

**empiricism**

The exclusive reliance on the human senses, particularly observation, to demonstrate the existence of things.

**the Enlightenment**

The name given to the moment in history around the middle of the eighteenth century when it was realized that because human beings, uniquely among living things, have the mental ability to reason for themselves and thereby act rationally, they need no longer rely on religion-inspired accounts of reality, which typically explain it as the creation of non-human, higher beings, such as gods or spirits. This emphasis on the potential of human reason encouraged the establishment of scientific reasoning and practice as the embodiment of rationality and marginalized religious thinking and practice, a process known as secularization.



<b>epistème</b>	Foucault's term for the world-view promoted by a particular discourse.
<b>false consciousness</b>	Marx's term for the inability of an exploited, oppressed class to appreciate the reality of its circumstances and to realize that it needs to act to free itself from these. For Marxists, false consciousness is explained by the presence of powerful ideologies – false depictions of the world – which make up such a large part of the superstructure of a class society.
<b>forces of production</b>	The Marxist term for the tools and techniques used in productive or economic activity: for example, a hoe, a tractor, an assembly line, a computer or a robot.
<b>functionalism</b>	A theoretical approach to human societies which emphasizes their integrated, interdependent, structured features. Functionalists often portray the workings of social systems as analogous to those of organic systems.
<b>globalization</b>	The name used to describe the ways in which the boundaries between different societies have been eroded. Those who claim that globalization is a central feature of contemporary life point to the transformations of world existence wrought by such features as the power of transnational corporations, electronic communication and global trading in both finance and manufacturing.
<b>historical or dialectical materialism</b>	The terms used to describe Marx's theory of history, in which he sees all human societies passing through the same epochs or times (though not at the same speed), and in which each is defined by different economic or productive systems.
<b>ideal type</b>	A Weberian concept, this refers to the deliberate portrayal of an aspect of human existence in as stark and one-sided a way as possible. The point is to omit the complexity you are perfectly well aware exists in favour of making your selected emphasis as clear as could be.
<b>ideology</b>	Sometimes used as a synonym for a belief system (a set of interrelated ideas) but more sensibly used to refer to a set of beliefs which deny the believer an understanding of the true nature of reality. For example, Marxists and some feminists point to the



ways in which ideologies are false depictions of reality which obscure, or at least justify and legitimate, class- and gender-based inequalities.

**indexicality**

The term used by ethnomethodologists to refer to the context-bound, or contingent, nature of human action. That is, the decision to act in a certain way can only make sense in the social context in which the action takes place. It therefore follows that any action can only be understood properly by appreciating this social context.

**individualism**

An approach that explains human behaviour as the product of an individual's unique characteristics, such as psychological makeup and personality traits.

**infrastructure/  
economic base**

For Marxists, the foundation or base on which any social system is built. In Marxist thought, the basis of any society is its particular form of economic or productive activity.

**institutionalization**

Goffman's term for the process whereby the establishments in which people live demand complete conformity from their inmates to rules of behaviour deemed necessary for organizational efficiency.

**instrumental  
rationality/  
instrumental  
reason**

For Weber the principal preoccupation in modernity, these terms refer to the application of the uniquely human ability to think and work out what to do solely in order to calculate the most efficient way of achieving something. That is, the pursuit of technical efficiency – for example, how to do things as cheaply as possible – prevails over all other considerations, such as working out whether something is good or bad, whether it is the right thing to do.

**materialism**

An approach that explains people's behaviour as the product of the physical facts of their lives.

**mechanical  
solidarity**

The type of solidarity found in pre-modern, traditional societies where social order is automatically, or mechanically, achieved because the inhabitants live similar lives and share similar beliefs.

**medicalization**

The exercise of medical power in order to regulate behaviour in realms of existence that have little or nothing to do with the body. This often means treating morality – concerns about right and wrong – as matters of health and illness, as in the medicalization of the family or the medicalization of sexuality.

**mode of production**

The Marxist term for a type of economy or way of producing goods and wealth. Apart from communistic economic activity, each mode – slavery, feudalism and capitalism – is based upon one dominant class exploiting the labour of a subordinate one in order to produce wealth. This wealth then becomes the private property of the dominant class.

**modernism**

The belief that humans, by the use of reason, can discover certain, objective truth about the nature and meaning of things and events and use this knowledge to improve the conditions of human existence.

**modernity**

The name given to the Enlightenment-inspired changes which began in the nineteenth century and which matured during the twentieth; its central features included industrial capitalism, scientific activity, huge population growth, urbanization and the secularization of knowledge.

**moral/cultural relativism**

The view that all values and value-judgements are inevitably cultural constructions and therefore can never be held to be objectively correct and of universal validity.

**naturalism**

An approach that explains human behaviour as a product of natural forces such as genetic makeup, evolution and the satisfaction of animal-like needs.

**ontological security**

The term Giddens uses to refer to the sense of safety and security, the equanimity that comes from the conviction that your world is morally and socially ordered and your place in it secure.

**organic solidarity**

The type of solidarity found in modern societies. Here people live very different lives from each other but because they are dependent on each other's different activities in order to survive, organic solidarity emerges. It is the solidarity that grows from the interdependence of different individuals.

**panopticism**

Foucault's term for the ways in which individuals regulate their own behaviour in case they are being observed. The panopticon was designed to be a prison in which the inmates knew they could never escape the surveillance of their guards.

**patriarchy**

The exercise of power in all its forms by men over women.



**positivism**

The approach which argues that an account of reality can be accepted as true only if it can be proved to be.

**postmodernism**

The view that contemporary existence is characterized by a loss of faith in the possibility, so central to Enlightenment ideals, that people can ever acquire objective truth or certain knowledge. Postmodernism holds that all human knowledge is inevitably a cultural creation. Since human beings can never stand outside the cultural influences that have made them who they are, human knowledge will always be a product of time and place.

**post-modernity**

The view that it is no longer accurate to say that we continue to live in modernity. According to postmodernists, the world has been so transformed in recent years that we have gone beyond modernity and now live in post-modern times. As a consequence, we need to develop new ways of making sense of this transformed existence.

**project of modernity**

Activities based on the belief that the acquisition of certain knowledge by the use of reason will enable humans to achieve continuing progress for themselves and their societies.

**proletariat**

The Marxist term for the class in capitalism that sells its labour power to employers in return for the wages its members need in order to survive.

**rationalization**

For Weber, the hallmark of modernity – the process whereby modern humans become so preoccupied with calculating how to do things efficiently.

**reductionism/  
reductive thinking**

These terms refer (pejoratively) to any analysis, such as one guilty of economic determinism, which ignores the possibility that many causal factors may be at work in favour of the view that only one matters.

**reflexivity**

The routine monitoring of yourself and your behaviour in order to decide who to be and how to live.

**reification**

The mistake of treating a concept as though it is a real thing. For example, to talk of the ideas or beliefs of a society, when in fact only human beings can have ideas and beliefs, is to reify the concept.



**relations of production**

The Marxist term for the ways in which individuals interact with each other in economic activity. Different economic systems or modes of production are characterized by different relations of production: for example, between the master and the serf in feudalism; between the employer and the wage-earner in capitalism.

**secularization**

The process whereby religious beliefs and practices lose social significance and influence.

**social solidarity**

Durkheim's term for the presence of social order in a society whose structure is solid and well-organized.

**social structure**

The characterization of human societies as a set of interrelated and interlocking features that make up an organized whole.

**social system**

A description of the ways in which the different elements in a social structure work and change together over time, such as in the analogy between the workings of a living organism and the workings of a society often drawn by functionalism.

**stereotyping**

Associated with labelling theory, this term summarizes the decision to attribute a complete identity to someone on the basis of their possession of one characteristic alone, as in 'All black men are . . .' or 'All women are . . .'.

**superstructure**

According to Marxists, all the elements in a social system that are not to do with its economy – the superstructure of non-economic activities, institutions, ideas and beliefs – are built upon and emerge from the economic base.

**value rationality**

A Weberian term, this involves the application of reason in order to decide what is right, or good, and what is bad, or wrong; that is, deciding what should be done.