authority's force: as such it is universal and indispensable.'[63] Braithwaite, too, has revived Durkheim in his analysis of the vital part played by shame in the workings of informal social control.[64] The functionalist message is clear.

And even if sociologists are not at all overt in their functionalism, there are many calling themselves by other names who resort to functionalist ideas. When a radical criminologist like Stuart Hall or Steven Box or Jeffrey Reiman[65] proclaims that the effect of publicized working-class crime is to support capitalism by deflecting attention from the doings of the powerful, functionalism is being advanced. When a structuralist like Mary Douglas states that the suppression of deviance promotes the integrity of cognitive orders, functionalism is being advanced. When a phenomenologist like Jack Douglas points to the symbolic interdependencies of good and evil, deviance and respectability, functionalism is being advanced. In short, there is a tacit but perfectly potent functionalism still lurking in much of the sociology of deviance.

[63] D. Garland, 'Frameworks of Inquiry in the Sociology of Punishment', 11. See, too, his *Punishment and Society*.

[64] See J. Braithwaite, *Crime, Shame and Reintegration*.

[65] See J. Reiman, *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*, esp. 34 f.

5

Anomie

Introduction

Anomie theory is distinctly out of fashion, perhaps permanently so in any explicit form. Like functionalism, from which it derives, it has become a routine conceptual folly for students to demolish before moving on to more rewarding ground. The critical onslaught has been particularly fierce in the case of Robert Merton's version of anomie theory, the turning-point being Clinard's collection of critical essays on this theme in 1964.[1] By contrast, Durkheim's original statement of anomie as a source of deviant behaviour has received more sympathetic treatment, largely because Durkheim is so central a figure in sociological history, and anomie is so central a concept in his thought. That is not the same thing, of course, as continuing to take it seriously. However, both Lukes and Horton, for example, discern in Durkheim's conception of anomie a philosophical critique of capitalist society in relation to which Merton's theory of anomie is at best confused and at worst 'dehumanized'.[2] Other critics are prone to dismiss both as seriously defective; Douglas attacked the entire methodology on which Durkheim's sociology rested; Rex views Merton's central idea as 'extraordinarily over-simplified' and seeks to rescue the bulk of Durkheim's sociology from its damaging association with the former's use of anomie; in Clinard's book, Lemert, Gagnon, and others dealt a seemingly terminal series of blows at both the theoretical and empirical weaknesses of the theory. By the 1970s, Paul Rock and Mary McIntosh could refer prosaically to the 'exhaustion of the anomie tradition'.[3]

[1] M. Clinard (ed.), *Anomie and Deviant Behavior*.

[2] S. Lukes, 'Alienation and Anomie'; J. Horton, 'The Dehumanisation of Alienation and Anomie'.

[3] J. Douglas, *The Social Meanings of Suicide*; J. Rex, *Discovering Sociology*, 234 ff.; Clinard, *Anomie and Deviant Behavior*; and P. Rock and M. McIntosh (eds.), *Deviance and Social Control*, p. xi.

If only for its centrality to the sociological tradition of theorizing about deviance, however, anomie theory deserves recovery. Among its strengths are a focus on the implications for deviance of one of the defining features of capitalist societies, that is, the fostering of the propensity to consume *irrespective of* the material possibilities of such a course; a meta-theory which is capable of application to societies other than those of the capitalist world; and the capacity, never greatly elaborated upon since Durkheim's day, of addressing the conditions that may suffice to determine the breakdown of social order.[4] So powerful a theory cannot be disregarded. It was something of a sociological counterpart to the cosmological Big Bang, and its effects have been both diffuse and lingering. Anomie theory was at first thought to be so compelling that it was subject to unusually sustained elaboration. After Durkheim and Merton, there followed Cloward and Ohlin, Spergel, Downes, and others working in a kind of tacit co-operation that appears only rarely in sociology. Much of the theory was never fully developed, but it has been expanded to become one of the most ambitious single attempts to explain deviance. (We shall pursue the application of that attempt to deviant subcultures in the next chapter.) More, anomie theory was under cultivation at a time of energetic social engineering in the United States, and it was appropriated to give intellectual coherence and legitimacy to Mobilization for Youth.[5] It thereby became one of the few well-documented instances of the sociology of deviance achieving a major (albeit retroactive) impact on policy formation. And, thirdly, it may be remarked that sociologists have not yet proved able to relinquish such a pivotal part of their thought. However much they may have protested about anomie theory, it has been reincarnated again and again. It has an anonymous presence in Jock Young's essay in labelling theory, *The Drugtakers*. It is the invisible prop to the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' radical work on class, youth, and deviance in Britain. Indeed, just as Karl Mannheim was called the *bourgeois* Marxist, so Hall, Clarke, and Hebdige of Birmingham could be labelled the radical anomie

[4] Though see, in particular, P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, and K. Erikson, *In The Wake of the Flood*.

[5] See Mobilization for Youth, *A Proposal for the Prevention and Control of Delinquency by Expanding Opportunities*.

theorists. Extensive echoes of the Big Bang will be discerned in any sensitive reading of the contemporary sociology of crime and deviance.

Durkheim's Theory of Anomie

There are two distinct usages of anomie in Durkheim. Lukes restates them as follows:

> In the 'Division of Labour in Society', it [anomie] characterizes the pathological state of the economy, 'this sphere of collective life which is in large part freed from the moderating action of [moral] regulation', where 'latent or active, the state of war is necessarily chronic' and 'each individual finds himself in a state of war with every other'. In 'Suicide', it is used to characterize the pathological mental state of the individual who is insufficiently regulated by society and suffers from 'the malady of infinite aspiration'. . . . It is accompanied by 'weariness', 'disillusionment', 'disturbance, agitation and discontent', 'anger' and 'an irritated disgust with life'. In extreme cases this condition leads a man to commit suicide and homicide.[6]

As this passage makes clear, a shift is already under way from anomie conceived of as a constant property of industrial society, to anomie as a variable with social-psychological implications. It is by no means the case, as Davis, for example, asserts, that this process originated with Merton's later adaptation of the concept.[7]

Durkheim's conception of anomie must be set in the context of his theory of social evolution. In his first use of the concept, it is in the transition of society from mechanical to organic solidarity that the division of labour assumes an anomic form. In the former state, the division of labour is minimal, and the term 'mechanical' is paradoxically employed to refer to the uniformity of consciousness in the simplest societies. A single normative system holds absolute sway. In the latter, it is assumed that (for no society has yet attained this state) the division of labour, though highly differentiated, has generated mediating institutions that assure social cohesion despite marked moral diversity. In the transition, however, anomie results from the rapid growth of the economy without a corresponding growth in the forces that could regulate it. 'Sheerly economic regulation is not enough . . . there

[6] S. Lukes, 'Alienation and Anomie', 138–9.

[7] N. Davis, *Sociological Constructions of Deviance*, 109.

should be moral regulation, moral rules which specify the rights and obligations of individuals in a given occupation in relation to those in other occupations'—'occupational groups' were somehow to be the source of this control.[8] A prerequisite is for the division of labour to assume a 'spontaneous' form, that is, individuals must be able to fill occupational positions which accord with their talents and which, therefore, they will accept as legitimate. This cannot prevail where the class system (or, presumably, any other form of stratification) inhibits the chances of large numbers of people attaining positions that fit their abilities. Such a 'forced' division of labour can only be abolished if all 'external' inequalities are ended, such as the hereditary transmission of property. It is in this sense that Taylor, Walton, and Young refer to Durkheim as a 'biological meritocrat', for he assumes an ideal correspondence is possible between 'internal' qualities and social position.[9] 'Labour is divided spontaneously only if society is constituted in such a way that social inequalities exactly express natural inequalities.'[10]

Anomie, then, is the peculiar disease of modern industrial man, for it is accepted as 'normal, a mark of moral distinction, it being everlastingly repeated that it is man's nature to be eternally dissatisfied, constantly to advance, without relief or rest, towards an indefinite goal'. Religion, governmental power over the economy, and occupational groups have lost their moral sway. Thus 'appetites have become freed of any limiting authority' and 'from top to bottom of the ladder, greed is aroused without knowing where to find ultimate foothold. Nothing can calm it, since its goal is far beyond all it can attain.'[11] In this analysis, class conflict and industrial crises are a symptom, not a cause, of anomie. Marx is reviewed as reversing the true causal priority, and, as a result, as proffering a false resolution of the problem, a purely economic cure.

In his second usage of the concept, in *Suicide*, Durkheim elaborates on the sources of variation in the experience of anomie. In this pioneering study, the techniques of multivariate analysis are deployed for sociological ends—it can hardly be maintained that Durkheim simply treated anomie as a constant and invari-

[8] A. Giddens, *Émile Durkheim: Selected Writings*, Introduction, 11.
[9] I. Taylor *et al.*, *The New Criminology*, 81 ff.
[10] E. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, 377.
[11] E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 256.

ant property of industrialism. His argument rests on the crucial nature of the distinction between social *integration* and social *regulation*, which—largely independently of each other—are viewed as causally related to different forms of suicide (see Table 1).

	Types of suicide	
	Integration	Regulation
Too strong	Altruistic	Fatalistic
Too weak	Egoistic	Anomic

Table 1.

With certain exceptions, the excessive strength of integration and regulation are linked with pre-industrial societies, and the types of suicide characteristically prevalent, such as the honorific and the ritualistic, derive from the excessive subordination of the individual to the group. The reverse obtains in the case of industrial societies.

The egoistic form of suicide was seen by Durkheim as the product of excessive individuation, or the 'cult of the individual', which he saw as the moral counterpart of a specialized division of labour. It was exemplified by the higher suicide rate among Protestants as compared with Catholics; among the unmarried compared with the married; and among the childless as compared with parents. The force of the thesis was most strikingly displayed by the explanation Durkheim gave of the lower rates that obtained at times of political crisis compared with periods of political stability, as in France in 1830, 1848, and 1870. 'Great social disturbances', he argued, 'and great popular wars, rouse collective sentiments, stimulate partisan spirit and patriotism and, concentrating activity towards a single end, at least temporarily, cause a stronger integration of society.'[12] Suicide, therefore, varies inversely with the degree of integration of society.[13]

[12] E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 208.
[13] A striking confirmation of this aspect of Durkheim's theory is provided by P. O'Malley, 'War and Suicide'. O'Malley argued that, if Durkheim was right, then the rate of suicide among Australian women should have fallen significantly at three points in Australia's involvement in World War II: her entry into the War, her defeats with other Allies in North Africa, and the fall of Singapore—a real threat to the Australian

Economic crises produced the contrary effect, a sharp increase in the suicide rate. This, argued Durkheim, is *not* due to the sudden loss of livelihood or amenities, for an increase in prosperity produces the same result as a decline. Also, suicide rates were at their lowest in the poorest regions of Europe, such as Calabria. (These also were the most Catholic, but Durkheim was not equipped statistically to avoid confounding possibilities of this sort.) To account for this phenomenon Durkheim invoked the concept of anomic suicide, that which flows from the disturbance such crises create in the regulatory aspect of social activity. Subject to deregulation in such crises, people's aspirations overshoot socially contrived limits, and fix on the unattainable. Durkheim spent a great deal of time accounting for people's inherent capacity to adopt this course *unless* they are curbed by social regulation. In striving to convey the character of anomie, Durkheim was driven to his most rabbinical purple passages: 'To pursue a goal which is by definition unobtainable is to condemn oneself to a state of perpetual unhappiness.'[14] It occurs because 'nothing appears in man's organic nor in his psychological constitution which sets a limit to such tendencies', i.e. the 'quantity of well-being, comfort or luxury legitimately to be craved by a human being'. 'It is not human nature which can assign the variable limits necessary to our needs. They are thus unlimited so far as they depend on the individual alone.' Hence, people must receive such regulation from 'an authority which they respect, to which they will yield spontaneously': such can only be provided by society. Hence, economic disasters and sudden surges in prosperity alike disrupt the capacity of society to exercise this influence and—for a time—all regulation is lacking. 'Consequently, there is no restraint upon aspirations . . . At the very moment when traditional rules have lost their authority, the richer prize offered these appetites stimulates them and makes them more impatient of control. The state of de-regulation of anomie is thus further heightened by passions being less disciplined, precisely

mainland. The theory was sustained by the available evidence. The only alternative explanation might lie in the processes whereby the definitions of suicide were contrived, and it is conceivable that coroners in wartime are swayed from such definitions for patriotic reasons—suicides betoken demoralization, etc. But no data exist to substantiate or refute this alternative.

[14] E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 248 ff. for this and subsequent quotations.

when they need more discipline.' The causal flow is from the prior fracturing of social regulation, to the adoption of unattainable goals, to suicide.

It is essential, in Durkheim's view, to avoid confounding that type of suicide stemming from the 'malady of infinite aspirations' with that resulting from the weakening of the social bond, in which the individual is 'detached from life because, seeing no goal to which he may attach himself, he feels himself useless and purposeless'. The two types also display distinctive psychological states at the point of suicide, and affect different groups in society. Egoistic suicide is associated with lassitude, weariness, goallessness, and has its principal victims among those in intellectual careers, the world of thought; anomie is associated with irritation, self-disgust, normlessness, and draws its recruits from the industrial and commercial world in which anomie is endemic and 'chronic'.

Despite Durkheim's eloquence, his attempts to differentiate egoism and anomie—and integration and regulation—strike many observers as overdone,[15] and, indeed, as beside the main point: that is, the tendency for industrialism to lead to what Weber termed the 'disenchantment of the world', with all that that implies by way of existential doubts and insecurities. A separate issue is: is a state of normlessness conceivable? This is, after all, an extremity beyond anarchy which is, properly conceived, the relatively simple notion—by comparison with anomie—of a society without government. A society without norms seems, on the face of it, a contradiction in terms. (There is also the problem of how, once deregulated, norms are reconstituted.) In general, cases where such extremes are approached empirically are infrequent, appearing in the very young and the very old; there are very few even among those designated mentally ill. The feral child, the senile dement, the psychopath are our only approximations to the anomic in everyday terms. There are, however, a few good descriptions of societies and communities that come close to Durkheim's conception of the anomic. Thus, Rainwater's *Behind Ghetto Walls*[16] depicted the mistrustful, nasty, alienated, and fragmented world of the Pruitt-Igoe housing development in St. Louis, Missouri. So suspicious and isolated

[15] See S. Lukes, 'Alienation and Anomie', 139, n. 14.
[16] L. Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls*.

had the tenants of the estate become that there was no longer anything approaching a viable social life. Neighbour preyed on neighbour. People were reluctant to leave their homes for fear of others breaking in. They were loath to ask one another to keep an eye on their apartments because everyone was a potential predator. In time, the municipal authority concluded that existence in Pruitt-Igoe was so intolerable that the apartment blocks would have to be physically destroyed by dynamite. A second example has been given by the major neo-Durkheimian, Kai Erikson. *Everything in its Path* (published in Britain as *In the Wake of the Flood*[17]) narrates the devastation caused by the collapse of a dam in the mining community of Buffalo Creek, West Virginia, in 1972. As 132 million gallons of mud rushed down the creek, it carried away houses, people, roads, and possessions. Many were killed and a once-orderly chain of communities was radically disrupted. Neat settlements were replaced by a haphazard trailer camp that incorporated no substantial social and architectural organization. There was an accompanying loss of moral regulation, a decline in co-operativeness, a pervading sense of meaninglessness, and a lack of purpose. People retreated inwardly, ceasing to busy themselves with one another. Rates of alcohol abuse and illegitimate births soared.[18]

There are other societies which could also be described as anomic. One was that of the peoples of New Guinea who, in the path of the American attack on the Japanese in the Pacific in the Second World War, had seen the sudden and inexplicable arrival of military aeroplanes carrying strange, powerful men and vast treasures, and had then seen the aeroplanes just as inexplicably depart again, never to return. The old economic and religious rationalities seemed to make no more sense. Far better was it to pray and wait for the strangers to return with their wonderful cargoes. In effect, the emergence of the 'cargo cults' signified a major loss of meaning and purpose.[19]

Another anomic society was that of the Ik of Northern Uganda, as documented by Turnbull.[20] These 'mountain people'

[17] K. Erikson, *In the Wake of the Flood*.

[18] For other essays exploring the same theme of the economic collapse of community, see K. Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble*.

[19] See P. Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*.

[20] C. Turnbull, *The Mountain People*.

were subjected to a sudden deregulation born of economic catastrophe, when their traditional hunting grounds were designated a national park. Though Turnbull does not invoke Durkheim, he lists a mixture of Ik characteristics reminiscent of both egoism and anomie: 'acrimony, envy and suspicion' even among (illegal) hunting parties;[21] 'excessive individualism, coupled with solitude and boredom';[22] 'lassitude and inertia'.[23] Children over the age of three, and the old or disabled, were abandoned or robbed: 'without killing, it is difficult to get closer to disposal than by taking the food out of an old person's mouth, and this was primarily an adjacent-generation occupation, as were tripping and pushing off balance. Moreover, I confess they never expressed any intent to kill; it was all good, clean fun.'[24] The extremities of hunger and dispossession, such as the industrial West has not experienced outside the concentration camps (since even in prison regular food and shelter are to be had), lead Turnbull away from moral censure. Like Durkheim, he is concerned to stress the similarities between the anomic and the lives that we lead (overdrawn as some of these are by Turnbull: leaving children to the bush is hardly the same as sending them to summer camp[25]). But he notes the extent to which, in a context of plenty unknown to the Ik, we countenance suffering at home and starvation abroad. However, in other respects, Durkheim's analysis does not fit the Ik. They did not lack a goal (as in egoism), for their goal was survival; nor did they 'aspire infinitely' (as in anomie), for they aspired very specifically towards such mundane goals as food and water. Yet, in key respects, Durkheim offers more of a vocabulary for the understanding and prediction of the Ik than other classical theorists. And though the Ik cannot be said to represent pure anomie (in which, presumably, no rules of conduct can obtain, and people resemble dements), they come sufficiently close for credence to be granted the proposition that 'sudden deregulation' may bring social disaster—though not necessarily so, since other peoples in the region of the Ik had prospered through relocation. The irony is that the best-documented example of this 'disease' of modern industrial man should be a pre-industrial people. As Turnbull stresses in perhaps too melodramatic a way, however, the parallels are all too close. Surely

[21] Ibid. 239. [22] Ibid. 238. [23] Ibid. 253. [24] Ibid. 252.

[25] Ibid. 234.

there are echoes of the Ik in the crime-ridden estates and neighbourhoods of America, France, and Britain, in Pruitt-Igoe,[26] Sarcelles, Blackbird Leys, Meadowell, and Ely[27] and 'Omega',[28] in the estates where attempts to establish neighbourhood watch and similar initiatives fail because neighbours simply do not trust one another enough to confide when they are about to leave their homes. One such divided and fearful London estate was graphically described by Sampson:

> [An] important feature was the multi-dimensional nature of residents' fears. Their lives were blighted by social conflicts and tensions. Some of these conflicts reflected divisions between gender, race, and age while others were about divergent life-styles, divisions between the employed and the unemployed, disparate values and the use of space on the estate. These differences engendered significant resistances to care watches, improved neighbouring and more effective social control between neighbours and their children. The fear of being attacked was found to be widespread, and for women this was a fear of sexual attack. The interviews with burglary victims showed that fears about burglary were also fears of being personally harmed. Living in run-down high density housing contributed to these 'fears'. Isolation seemed to be another source of anxiety.[29]

Indeed, anomic disorder is beginning increasingly to preoccupy many sociologists of crime and deviance. They may not use the word 'anomie' explicitly, but that is what their analysis conveys. Much of the world appears to them to be veering towards a disorganization and disequilibrium in which the State and formal social control, community and informal social control, can no longer be taken for granted. One of the most graphic examples has been provided by Mike Davis in his description of Los Angeles as a topography emerging immediately from the nightmare worlds of Blade Runner and Mad Max. Public, comprehensive regulation has collapsed in Los Angeles, Davis argues. The rich buy private safety in their own defended enclaves. The poor are exposed only to perfunctory policing which keeps them under token control but offers no security. And the outcome is that, in the poorest areas, beyond the fortified core in which the

[26] See L. Rainwater, *Behind Ghetto Walls*.
[27] See B. Campbell, *Goliath: Britain's Dangerous Places*.
[28] See F. Reynolds, *The Problem Estate*.
[29] A. Sampson, *Lessons from a Victim Support Crime Prevention Project*, 32–3.

rich live and work, may be found 'the halo of barrios and ghettos [where there] is now a free-fire zone where crack dealers and street gangs settle their scores with shotguns and Uzis. . . . Both cops and gangmembers already talk with chilling matter-of-factness about the inevitability of some manner of urban guerilla warfare.'[30]

What Davis claimed for Los Angeles has been extrapolated to whole societies. Some have alleged that disintegrating economies, dysfunctional governments, unenforceable frontiers, uncontrolled population movement, and the globalization of crime have combined to render states inoperative as the effective makers and enforcers of law. Governments will no longer be able to impose their will within or across their own borders. There will no longer be the assurance that the sovereign state can provide security or law and order. Corruption will be endemic. In short, there has arisen in many parts of the world an 'appalling expression of . . . the obliteration of any distinction between political dispute and criminal violence'.[31] War itself will cease to be a relatively disciplined process conducted between the identifiable armies of discrete States who wield a monopoly of violence. Rather, it will be replaced by what van Creveld has called a ubiquitous 'low-intensity conflict' that inflicts a previously unsurpassed level of violence on civilians and armed forces alike.[32] In 'The Coming Anarchy', Kaplan writes about the increasing lawlessness of several African states, the emergence of criminal anarchy as a strategic danger, the pursuit of war as an end in itself, the 'privatization of violence', and the breakdown of armies and police forces as accountable bureaucracies. His future is bleak indeed: there will be a 'rundown, crowded planet of skinhead Cossacks and *juju* warriors, influenced by the worst refuse of Western pop culture and ancient tribal hatreds, and battling over scraps of over-used earth in guerilla conflicts that ripple across conflicts and intersect in no discernible pattern'.[33]

[30] M. Davis, 'Beyond Blade Runner', 6, 721.
[31] S. Cohen, 'Crime and Politics', 19.
[32] M. van Creveld, *The Transformation of War*, 58, 192.
[33] R. Kaplan, 'The Coming Anarchy', 62–3.

Merton's Theory of Anomie

Merton took the conception of anomie as a starting-point for fresh theorizing, rather than as an end-product to be embellished.[34] The very different context in which he was writing, the America of the immediate post-Depression years, provides the main clue to the divergent course he took. For Merton, the key feature of his society of the 1930s was the contrast between the American Dream and the enduring reality of harsh economic inequality. The difference between that society and the France of the 1890s, in which Durkheim had written, lay chiefly in the Dream and not the inequality. In Europe, centuries of inequality were institutionalized in the complexities and subtleties of a class society that re-formed rather than changed in any dramatic way. Despite 1789, hereditary privilege and status still counted. By contrast, as the floods of immigrants to the New World testified, America still held out the promise of an open society. At some point before 1917, even Lenin and Trotsky had contemplated emigration to the USA. In America, no hereditary aristocracy held even vestigial sway. There was Old Money and New Money, but in the end it was simply money that counted. Hence there was the American Dream, open to all, given hard work and the opportunity to realize one's talents.

In this context, Merton argued, the condition of anomie which Durkheim had regarded as exceptional, as visited upon people in boom and slump but as otherwise held at bay by social regulation, becomes routine, a built-in feature of the social world. In this respect, he came closer to Durkheim's first Hobbesian depiction of anomie as endemic in industrial capitalism.[35] But the *source* of anomie for Merton was not the asymmetry between talent and reward; it lay rather in the lack of symmetry between the culture and the social structure. The 'culture' of the USA was taken to be, at bottom, the American Dream; but the social structure, however rapidly and widely it spawned and spread prosperity, could not yield limitless opportunities for all. Only a minority could enjoy the reality of superabundance. As a process, however, 'Americanization' pivoted on the hope that ultimately

[34] R. Merton, 'Social Structure and Anomie'.

[35] Durkheim also regarded the state of anomie as 'chronic' in the 'sphere of trade and industry' in his analysis in *Suicide*; see especially 254–8.

all could attain levels of prosperity unknown by all but the tiny aristocratic and bourgeois élites of old Europe. 'Infinite aspirations', far from being released only under the shock of economic disturbance, were the very seam of the cultural fabric of the American way of life. Such a phenomenon was unprecedented, since only in America were the conditions of advanced industrial society combined with a distinctive ideology of classless egalitarian democracy; for this reason, Merton regarded his theory as applicable only to America. The basic argument on which it was based, however, i.e. the consequences of disjunction between goals, and the means of goal attainment, could be applied to any social context where the same type of disparity arose.

The pursuit of infinite aspirations was not seen by Merton as an innate human tendency that emerged whenever social regulation was weakened. It was, rather, the product of a particular culture that needed incessant nurture if it was to persist and develop. A key feature of Merton's theory is his sensitivity to the dramatic growth of advertising in the inter-war period; a necessary adjunct to the growth of mass production and mass distribution was mass consumption. In this respect, Merton is—as Gouldner has noted—at one with Marx.[36] The fostering of the propensity to consume, with its creation of wants and dissatisfactions, is basic to economic growth in 'free market' economies. American ideology supplied the cultural counterpart of economic accumulation: fluid social mobility, the capacity to make it from Log Cabin to White House, was transmitted as a core value by the churches, the schools, and the mass media. The 'success' goal was sacred, failure profane: but in a society founded on the repudiation of monarchy and aristocracy, success came to be symbolized by sheer material gain (a future predicted with some assurance by de Tocqueville a century earlier). 'Money-success' was coined by Merton as *the* core value of American society, a 'cultural goal' extolled above all others.

For Durkheim, deregulation led to infinite aspirations; for Merton, infinite aspirations led to deregulation. The result, for both, was the same: high rates of deviation. The 'strain to anomie' crystallized in Merton's view in four types of deviance, differentiated by their combination of either acceptance or

[36] See Gouldner's Foreword to I. Taylor *et al.*, *The New Criminology*, pp. x–xi.

	Culturally prescribed goal	Institutionally available means
Conformity	acceptance	acceptance
Deviant adaptations:		
Innovation	acceptance	rejection
Ritualism	rejection	acceptance
Retreatism	rejection	rejection
Rebellion	replacement	replacement

Table 2.

rejection of the goal and the means for realizing the goal (see Table 2).

Despite the formidable strain to anomie, the majority of the population adhered, in Merton's view, to conformity. The mass of middle America remained small-town Puritans, wedded to cautious advancement but with an eye to the main chance. Their conformity ensured some social stability. For those unable to hold the socio-cultural tensions in balance, however, four 'deviant adaptations' were available. The first of these, 'innovation', basically involved the adoption of illegitimate means to the attainment of the cultural goal, 'money-success'. Crime, as Bell was later to put it, was a 'queer ladder of social mobility' in American life. The rackets were the deviant response to the small-town Puritans' recipe for conformity, Prohibition. But any chicanery in politics or worldly affairs would exemplify deviant innovation just as well. Its mirror-image, 'ritualism', entailed the elimination of the goal and an obsessive attachment to the institutional means: here Merton is attempting to capture the ultra-conservative response to social tension, the celebration of sticking to the rules, of 'being in a rut', of staying put, that characterizes much of respectable lower- and middle-class life. 'Retreatism' involves the rejection of both goals *and* means, by dropping out of conventional society and yet not consciously striving to construct one afresh: the tramp, the hobo, the drug-taker are his key examples. Finally, 'rebellion' is seen as the rare attempt to resolve the tensions by not only rejecting both aspects of the status quo,

but also actively seeking to replace them by alternative goals and means. Merton illustrated his thesis with a wealth of symbolic reference to key cultural myths. Empirically, his central conclusion was that, owing to the more intense and widespread experience of the disparity between the goal and the means at the bottom of the social hierarchy, deviance is inversely related to social status. Again, Durkheim had argued the reverse, for in his view, the social pressure exerted by the layers above them acts to limit the aspirations of the lower orders: 'those who have only empty space above them are almost inevitably lost in it'.[37] By contrast, Merton writes:

> Of those located in the lower reaches of the social structure, the culture makes incompatible demands . . . In this setting, a cardinal American virtue—'ambition'—promotes a cardinal American vice—'deviant behaviour' . . . Within this context, Al Capone represents the triumph of amoral intelligence over morally prescribed 'failure' when the channels of vertical mobility are closed or narrowed in a society which places a high premium on economic affluence and social ascent for *all* its members.[38]

Merton's brief statement of anomie theory was first published in 1938, and revised and somewhat expanded versions were included in the four editions through which his major textbook has passed over the last 50 years. For almost half that period, it received almost uncritical acceptance; since the early 1960s, it has been over-critically rejected. Before going on to the criticisms that have real substance, it is useful to look at those which appear misplaced. The first of these is that Mertonian anomie theory presumes a simple consensus about the primacy of 'money-success' as a cultural goal. It is necessary to point out that sharing a goal does not imply simple consensus: the sharing of goals can generate the most bitter conflict. Hence, anomie theory does not collapse when confronted with the realities of class and value conflict, since class divisions and value conflicts may be framed in terms of inequalities of access to material wealth which all (to varying extents) desire. In his analysis of class and class conflict in Britain, for example, Westergaard documents the division of life-chances that persists along class lines, in terms of wealth, income, health, educational achievement, mobility, and even

[37] E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 257.
[38] R. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 145–6.

access to welfare. He cites as an aggravating feature of class conflict the very 'revolution in rising expectations' which has often been equated with the 'withering away' of class: such expectations tend to surpass the material possibilities of their fulfilment, and promote what Marshall termed 'mild economic anomie'.[39] The fostering of the propensity to consume means that all come to share the aspirations once appropriate only to the élite: 'the luxuries of today become the necessities of tomorrow'. This process is entirely in accord with that of Merton's theory: though it is clear that class loyalties may profoundly modify the strain to anomie, they hardly negate it.

A second such criticism is that, in a diverse and complex society, 'money-success' is not the only goal; it merely competes with myriad other goals for a claim on energy and time; or it is itself mainly a *means* to quite different goals, such as family support and well-being. To pursue a variety of goals is not, however, to transcend the goal of 'money-success', which is at its most potent when legitimized by 'higher' things: the 'family' is as important to the 'Godfather' as to the early settlers. It may well be that it is successfully resisted by a minority of active 'rebels'; but so all-pervasive is the cash-nexus that such 'rebellion' is rare, and may well be replaced by an equally exclusive 'cultural goal', such as membership of a religious 'elect' or of a 'party' élite that are in themselves anomie-promoting. The abolition of private property has not abolished, but has heightened, the attractiveness of the perquisites of high office in State socialist societies.

A third, vivid criticism is that Merton's theory is both ahistorical and lacking in critical perspective. Laurie Taylor compares Merton's image of society to that of a giant fruit-machine,[40] whose pay-outs are rigged, but which most players delude themselves into perceiving as fair. The deviants are those who try to rig the machine to *their* advantage; who play it blindly and obsessively; who ignore its existence; or who smash it up and seek a better model. Nowhere, however, says Taylor, does Merton tell us who is taking the profits, and who put the machine there in the first place. This telling criticism applies more to Merton's exposition of his theory than to the validity of the theory itself,

[39] T. Marshall, *Sociology at the Crossroads*; J. Westergaard, 'The Withering Away of Class'.

[40] L. Taylor, *Deviance and Society*, 148.

for it would strengthen the theory rather than the reverse if it were to be prefaced by a history of American capitalist exploitation, and a synopsis of who owns what.

Anomie and After

Merton would never have described himself as a criminologist or sociologist of deviance: his interest lay elsewhere, in formal theorizing and in the sociology of science and knowledge. Although his account of anomie was to be so very central to the analysis of deviance, it was also oddly brief and uncherished. Anomie was discussed in two essays which were never lengthy or expansive enough to develop more than a few of its possibilities. There was to be no reply to many of the criticisms subsequently levelled at his thesis. It would not have been difficult to form a response or adapt his theory, but ideas were left in limbo.

In a sympathetic but critical reappraisal of Merton's theory, Albert Cohen noted that its author had laid it out in a surprisingly insulated fashion, not only from the allied work in the sociology of crime and deviance in the 1920s and 30s, but also from his own contributions to general sociology: reference group theory and role theory.[41] Reference group theory has alerted us to the limited social worlds in which people invest their energies, and the generally limited horizons which mark them out. We typically compare ourselves, not with the upper echelons or the supremely successful, but with the peer groups of our own age, sex, and approximate social position. Among others, Runciman has demonstrated this effect for a variety of groups in Britain: manual workers tend to compare themselves with other manual workers, rather than with dukes.[42] Role theory is concerned with the kinds of people it is possible to be in a society, and with how roles are allocated and taken on; but, again, we are mostly preoccupied with roles that are accessible to us, and not with those beyond our reach. Knowing this, asks Cohen, how could Merton propound so individualistic a theory as anomie, as if people exercise choice in a kind of social vacuum, save for their sense of strain born of a heightened awareness of success-goals? Had Merton combined these different aspects of his own theorizing,

[41] A. Cohen, 'The Sociology of the Deviant Act', 5–14.

[42] W. Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*.

he would surely have made a more realistic thesis. As it stands, anomie theory is static, individualistic, mechanistic, and focused on 'initial states and deviant outcomes rather than on processes whereby acts and complex structures of action are built, elaborated and transformed'.[43] People do not jump from conformity to deviance without, typically, 'a tentative, groping, advancing, backtracking, sounding-out process' going on. Cohen's own seminal contribution to meeting this difficulty, whilst retaining the strengths of the goals–means formulation, was the concept of subcultural process,[44] and it is in the development of different versions of subcultures of deviance that anomie theory has persisted most influentially.

Otherwise, anomie as an explicit concept has been little more than marginal in the development of post-war theories of social problems, and almost totally absent from theories of social structure. Parsons[45] and Rex used it to mean imperfect understanding.[46] Empirically, despite many attempts, it did not lend itself to survey work or field methods of observation.[47] Becker parodied the theory in guying students who failed to find it on visits to car factories.[48] Like phlogiston in eighteenth-century physics, it increasingly appeared to be an artefact of an outmoded view of the social universe. The few serious attempts to measure its incidence have not established support for the theory in any direct sense. Stinchcombe found the strongest pressures for 'rebellion' lay among middle-class boys in high school, whose commitment to success goals was most marked and whose failure to achieve the most resented.[49] This finding has implications for any theory which invokes anomie and/or subcultural variants as an explanation for lower-class delinquency, but undermined confidence in Merton's overall theoretical emphasis on high rates of deviance among the lower classes. Mizruchi complicated the model further by suggesting that middle-class anomie ('boundlessness') differed fundamentally from working-class anomie ('bondlessness').[50] Srole's 'anomie scale' employed questions designed to elicit the

[43] A. Cohen, 'The Sociology of the Deviant Act', 9. [44] See Chapter 6.
[45] T. Parsons, *The Social System*, 39. [46] J. Rex, *Key Problems*, 177.
[47] See the formidable inventory compiled by S. Cole and H. Zuckermann in Clinard, *Anomie and Deviant Behavior*, 243–83.
[48] H. Becker, 'Labelling Theory Reconsidered', 50.
[49] A. Stinchcombe, *Rebellion in a High School*.
[50] F. Mizruchi, *Success and Opportunity*.

extent to which people felt at home in the world, but items such as 'little can be accomplished in a society which is seen as basically unpredictable and lacking order' appeared more as tests of political orthodoxy than existential unease.[51] Such over-schematic tests were so reliant on ambiguous indicators and almost infinitely elastic and subjective measures of 'deviance' that the theory faded from serious consideration.

Yet the questions raised most profoundly by anomie theory recur in various guises, most recently as the central strand in Left Realism,[52] and also as the underlying concern in theories of crime, modernization, and development. In their analysis of a collection of studies of cross-national criminal trends, Heiland and Shelley (1992) examined 'the complementary and sometimes contradictory concepts of civilization and modernization'[53] in relation to the development of crime and social control. Their inference from the work of Norbert Elias[54] is that

> in the pre-modern age sanctions controlled individual actions by external controls. But with the development of civilization, controls are slowly shifted inwards. . . . If Elias's hypothesis is correct that interpersonal relations change with the civilization of society, then so should the nature of interpersonal violence and crime. Important indicators of this process of civilization would be a decline in violent crime and an increase in self-inflicted harm (i.e. drugs) on individuals.[55]

In Garland's summary:

> typically, the civilizing process in culture involves a tightening and a differentiation of the controls imposed by society upon individuals, a refinement of conduct, and an increased level of psychological inhibition as the standards of proper conduct become ever more demanding. . . . It is the specific and fragile outcome of an evolutionary process which was socially determined though by no means inexorable, and which may at any time be reversed if wars, revolutions, or castrophes undermine the forms of social organization and interdependence upon which it depends.[56]

[51] See the comments by Merton in Clinard, *Anomie and Deviant Behavior*, 227–8.
[52] See below, 267 *et seq.*
[53] H.-G. Heiland and L. Shelly, 'Civilization, Modernization and the Development of Crime and Control', 7.
[54] N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process (Vol. 2): State Formation and Civilization*, and 'Violence and Civilization: The State Monopoly of Physical Violence and its Infringement'.
[55] H.-G. Heiland and L. Shelley, 'Civilization, Modernization and the Development of Crime and Control', 3–4.
[56] D. Garland, *Punishment and Society*, 217–18.

These changes of sensibility, first evident amongst the court aristocracies in Europe and later assumed by the rising bourgeoisie, were to become far more widely diffused in the course of the twentieth century. They are seen, most importantly by Spierenburg,[57] to entail a shift from brutal and degrading to less punitive and more restrained forms of punishment. Yet, as Garland notes,[58] the thesis is prone to over-interpret rhetoric and to underplay the force of institutional change. However, some support for the thesis can be found in the widespread evidence for a 'long-term and very substantial decline in levels of violent crime in English society from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries'.[59] Gurr[60] both documents and explains this decline in terms of the 'growing sensitization to violence' and 'the development of increased internal and external controls on aggressive behaviour'. Stone, Thomas, Beattie, and Gatrell[61] also provide a wealth of supportive theory and evidence for the overall trend. There seems little doubt that, whatever the reasons, violence and aggression in civil society were massively and progressively reined in over the period from the late medieval to the mid-twentieth century.

The very strength of this evidence, however, serves to magnify the problem of how one might account for trends *since* the mid-twentieth century in terms of this theory. For if, as Elias contends, psychic configurations have been restructured and profound cultural transformations have enveloped whole societies, the rise in rates of violent crime since the 1950s becomes truly anomalous. One can only sustain the theory by assuming with McClintock[62] that the 'growing sensitization to violence'

[57] P. Spierenburg, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Repression*, 217–18.

[58] D. Garland, *Punishment and Society*, 229–30.

[59] Ibid. 230.

[60] T. Gurr, 'Historical Trends in Violent Crime', and Gurr *et al.*, *The Politics of Crime and Conflict*.

[61] L. Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*; K. Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*; J. Beattie, 'Violence and Society in Early Modern England'; V. Gatrell, 'The Decline of Theft and Violence in Victorian and Edwardian England'.

[62] F. McClintock, *Crimes of Violence*. Certainly the rise of feminism in the late 1960s and early 1970s was accompanied by an increasing awareness of the problems posed by violence against women and children, particularly in the domestic sphere. What had previously been treated by many as a private matter, not to be brought into the open or managed as a problem for criminal justice, came, in time, to be redefined as a criminal phenomenon that could neither be ignored nor resolved by informal methods of dispute resolution.

widened the net to include minor assaults which would previously have gone unreported and unrecorded (in which case, it seems that trends in official crime rates are to be accepted when they suit the thesis but rejected when they do not); or we must presume a greatly increased propensity to violence amongst a minority somehow untouched by the 'civilizing process'. The latter argument has much in common with theories of the 'new underclass' (see Chapter 6).

A second problem with the thesis is its incapacity to account not simply for wars, revolutions and catastrophes, viewing these phenomena as setbacks to the civilizing process rather than as problems which it does not address, but also for the capacity of the *most highly civilized* societies to degenerate into what can only be called genocidal abattoirs. As George Steiner[63] has observed, to the Jews, 'the house of civilization proved no shelter'. These questions remain unanswered by any sociology (although some, like Bauman, have made the attempt), but they present particular difficulties for a thesis pivoting on a conception of civilization which does not, as in Durkheim's idea of anomie, allow for the sudden collapse of hard-won moral regulation.

'Modernization' theories of crime stress the disruptive impact of industrialization and urbanization on traditional ways of life. Their proponents seek to link the uneven development of different dimensions of modernization with trends in crime and its control (see, for example, Shelley; Clinard and Abbott[64]). Heiland and Shelley argue:

> Modernization is a continually developing process of structural differentiation, combined with an increase in the complexity of the norms of social organization. . . . It has been graphically shown that modernization does not always lead to more contentment and harmony. Rather, enhanced social tensions, conflicts and social disharmony are the results of social differentiation, the growing number of life choices, and the relative deprivation that accompanies the modernization process . . . With modernization, a shift occurs in the relationship among forms of criminal behavior. Violent offenses become less important as property offenses achieve pre-eminence . . . As modernization proceeds, inequality still exists, . . . the crime pattern begins to change from crimes typical of poverty to crimes common to the affluent society. Many property

[63] G. Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays and Notes 1958–1966*, 175.

[64] L. Shelly, *Crime and Modernization*; M. Clinard and D. Abbott, *Crime in Developing Countries: A Comparative Perspective*.

crimes are not caused by societal or individual crises such as unemployment or illness, but by wealth and the abundance of goods.[65]

Empirical support for the theory can be found in such studies as that of Schichor,[66] who explored the relationship between patterns and trends of crime and various socio-economic factors in 44 countries: 'Modernization is negatively associated with violent crime (homicide) and positively associated with property crime (larceny).' Economic development increases the availability of material possessions and their cultural priority. As he observes, however, property crimes are also more likely to be reported and recorded in more modern societies, not least due to the making of insurance claims. Regression analysis also masks some immense variation between countries within each category. Compare, for instance, the much higher levels of violence in the United States of America than in Western Europe or Japan.

Overall, theories of civilization, modernization, and crime cover much the same ground as anomie theories, but avoid, presumably deliberately, the strong emphasis on the damage wrought by the pursuit of 'infinite aspirations' which links Durkheim and Merton. The analytical need to integrate the 'civilizing process' with that of 'modernization' leads Heiland and Shelley to loose rule-of-thumb judgements, such as 'Japan appears to be a developed society which has succeeded in both developing and civilizing'[67] and 'it would be presumptuous to suggest that the tendency towards civilization is absent in the USA' but high rates of violent crime and punishment do show 'how difficult it is to maintain the standards of a civilized society'.[68]

Similar problems arise in the global resort to evolutionist concepts in the work of Clinard and Abbott on crime in developing countries.[69] Rapid urbanization and uneven industrialization in developing countries are seen as the key causal preconditions for soaring rates of crime and delinquency. In what has come to be

[65] H.-G. Heiland and L. Shelley, 'Civilization, Modernization and the Development of Crime and Control', in H.-G. Heiland, L. Shelley, and H. Katch (eds.), *Crime and Control in Comparative Perspective*, 5–6.

[66] D. Schichor, 'Crime Patterns and Socio-economic Development: A Cross-National Analysis'.

[67] H.-G. Heiland and L. Shelly, 'Civilization, Modernization and the Development of Crime and Control', 18.

[68] Ibid. 10.

[69] M. Clinard and D. Abbott, *Crime in Developing Countries: A Comparative Perspective*.

regarded, rather dismissively, as the 'orthodox criminological perspective' on crime in developing countries,[70] Clinard and Abbott proposed a neo-Durkheimian perspective based on the mismatch between rapid change and social regulation. It is an optimistic model hinged on the assumption that once developing countries 'catch up' with the developed, crime and delinquency rates will level off, at least in their violent form. Sumner is scathingly critical of this 'fundamental misconception' of modernization in the developing world as a 'delayed replay of nineteenth-century European development with its extensive urbanization and industrialization . . . held up (mainly) by the deep sleep of "custom" or the rigid ties of "tradition" '.[71]

It is all too evident that no such exact parallelism exists. The global expansion of nineteenth-century Western capitalism was relatively unfettered, whilst the modernization of late twentieth-century developing countries is massively distorted by capitalist penetration and direction. 'Modernization' theory only sees crime as a result of 'development' and the criminal law as crime's necessary counterpoint. What it does not see is all the criminal law and crime that went into the very making of 'underdevelopment'.[72] Sumner is, however, too sweeping in his condemnation of Clinard and Abbott's 'social reformism'. In Hong Kong, for example, anti-corruption measures and economic development made some impact on rates of violent crime.[73] In short, there are huge variations to be mapped and, while some of the studies we have cited have made an impressive beginning, the dismissal of anomic theories, or stripping them down to their critical elements in the pursuit of somewhat bland notions of 'modernization' and development, seem premature.

Criticism

'These facts', Durkheim stated characteristically, in a crucial passage in *Suicide*,[74] 'are susceptible of only one interpretation'. Durkheim's passion for facts, his demand that 'social facts' should be 'treated as things', is the basis for his particular form of sociological positivism. But even the most sympathetic reader

[70] C. Sumner (ed.), *Crime, Justice and Underdevelopment*, ch. 1.

[71] Ibid. 22.

[72] Ibid. 35.

[73] H. Traver, 'Crime Trends', 22.

[74] E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 208.

of *Suicide* cannot fail to be struck by Durkheim's boldness in bending 'the facts' to suit his theory. 'Crises' are classified as such on several occasions to suit the suicide rate, rather than being allowed to stand as anomalies. For example, the unification of Italy is treated as an economic, not as a political, event, primarily—one suspects—because it coincided with a rise rather than a decline in the suicide rate. Certain elections which produced, in Durkheim's view, a change in the suicide rate comparable in scale and intensity to the major crises of 1830, 1848, and 1870 lead him to comment, 'Mild as they are, mere election crises sometimes have the same result (as crises of war and revolution).'[75]

Douglas has argued that Durkheim's whole approach (and, by extension, that of positivism in general) was based on a methodological fallacy.[76] The flaw can be illustrated by Durkheim's treatment of the different suicide rates of Protestants and Catholics, of fundamental importance for his concept of egoism. Durkheim asserted that *both* groups strongly opposed suicide on theological grounds, and therefore the differences between the two groups' rates of suicide could not be accounted for in terms of their belief structures. Rather, it was the Protestant emphasis on free enquiry that attenuated the social bond and promoted greater strain towards egoistic suicide among Protestants. Douglas criticizes Durkheim for not going beyond sheer assertion on so crucial a point, since the particular form of Catholic doctrine concerning suicide, which entails eternal damnation, is far more emphatic than Protestant doctrine. The point for Douglas, however, is not simply that Durkheim was wrong on a specific point, however crucial; it is that his method of reliance on official rates eliminated the possibility of eliciting such meanings from individuals.

Differences in the official rates of suicide were taken by Durkheim to be social facts *sui generis*. Douglas asserts by contrast that they are prone to all the weaknesses inherent in official statistics, and are most prone to distortion in just those respects where differences in the rates are most crucial, as in the case of Protestants and Catholics, or at times of crisis. Against this view,

[75] E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 204.
[76] J. Douglas, *The Social Meanings of Suicide*, and also in A. Giddens (ed.), *The Sociology of Suicide*.

Durkheim tried to guard himself against the charge that many of the variations he noted were administrative artefacts, as may be caused, for example, at points of revolutionary change by the disruption of the administrative machinery for the registration of suicides. Were this the case, Durkheim argued on several occasions, the rates would be affected only in the areas where disruption was located, whereas in reality the variations were far more widespread. Douglas, however, is most concerned to stress the ways in which officials are themselves influenced by the social meanings of suicide. For example, the view that certain social situations, such as social isolation, may promote suicide, may influence coroners in returning such a verdict in otherwise ambiguous cases. Researchers then proceed to establish isolation as a 'cause' of suicide, and the theory appears confirmed. Social meanings also pervade the presentation of death in everyday life: Durkheim's confidence in the suicide statistics is summed up in his phrase 'a corpse is a corpse', but if, for example, some groups rather than others, for doctrinal and/or social reasons, have a strong interest in concealing or disguising suicides, the official rates may compound this practice. Durkheim himself allowed for the passive as well as the active suicide—the man who fails to stop himself falling as distinct from jumping—but arguably failed to follow this insight through to a radical enough extent. In his Table XXX, of suicides as classified by manner of death, such processes as drowning, leaping from a high place, and self-strangulation by hanging outnumber poisonings and other forms of self-inflicted destruction less amenable to ready classification as suicide.[77] Douglas's alternative approach, the close scrutiny of suicide notes and allied correspondence, was expressly ruled out by Durkheim as unrepresentative. This exclusive reliance on official rates was assumed by Durkheim to be valid because of the regularity and stability of such rates: but if errors fit stable patterns, and are routinely reproduced, this assumption is invalid. The fallacy is to presume that official rates and indices are somehow constructed independently of social meanings.

This criticism was employed with even greater force against the assumption of Merton that the lower class were pressurized into higher rates of deviance than the middle and upper classes.

[77] E. Durkheim, *Suicide*, 291.

'Anomie theory stands accused of predicting far too little bourgeois criminality and too much proletarian criminality.'[78] This time it is the acceptance of the official rates of crime and delinquency, rather than that of suicide, which is seen as unwarranted. In Box's view, by accepting a simple inverse relationship between deviance and social status, Merton reduces anomie theory to that of 'relative deprivation'.[79] The entire house of cards collapses once this prop is removed, and the theories which base themselves upon it can be seen as mystifications blurring our view of 'deviance, reality, and society'. Such a perspective is reproduced in police practices, which focus far more on public working-class than on private middle- or upper-class criminality. These practices naturally lead to official statistics which lend credence to the theory, and so, in a self-confirmatory circle, a politically innocuous conception of deviance is propagated.

Lindesmith and Gagnon note the severe limitations of both Merton's theory of anomie and one of its variants, the 'double failure' hypothesis of Cloward and Ohlin, in accounting for the social character of addiction.[80] Merton had typified addicts, along with vagrants, inebriates, and psychotics, as retreatists, i.e. 'as non-productive liabilities' and as 'asocialized persons who are *in* society but not *of* it', who have both 'relinquished culturally prescribed goals and abandoned the quest for success'.[81] Even if it is conceded that not all anomie produces deviance, and not all deviance flows from anomie, Lindesmith and Gagnon argue that the theory fails to specify clearly *which* forms of addiction may flow from anomie; or to confront the reverse proposition, that addiction may led to anomie; or to square with the specialized social skills that addicts must develop if they are to survive the control measures against them, and finance a highly expensive habit; or to convey the complexity of the social worlds constructed by the diverse groups so readily tagged 'asocial'. The application of anomie theory to a specific form of deviance raises,

[78] I. Taylor *et al.*, *The New Criminology*, 107.

[79] S. Box, *Deviance, Reality and Society*, 105–6. Box bases his case on the much more random distribution of criminality to be inferred from 'self-report' studies. For a critique of such studies, see A. Reiss, 'Inappropriate Theories and Inadequate Methods as Policy Plagues: Self-Reported Delinquency and the Law', 21–2. Reiss argues *inter alia* that police practices are largely *reactive*, and therefore have little probable impact on crime rates.

[80] A. Lindesmith and J. Gagnon, 'Anomie and Drug Addiction'.

[81] R. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, 142–4.

in short, the most fundamental doubts about its capacity to either explain or enhance our understanding of the origins, consequences, and processes of development of deviance in general.

In the same volume, Lemert argues that the theory 'strains credulity' for reasons that go beyond the purely logical or empirical. Firstly, the very terms so confidently used by Merton to sustain his theory are highly problematic: 'social structure' and 'culture' are at best abstractions that are exceptionally difficult to differentiate in terms of data, at worst reifications that derive from the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. 'Inescapable circularity lies in the use of "culture" as a summary to describe modal tendencies in the behaviour of human beings and, at the same time, as a term of designating the causes of the modal tendencies.'[82] The same term, 'culture', tends to be applied across the board to the small-scale, relatively unified society (such as Tikopia) and to the highly differentiated agglomeration of often diverse sub-societies, such as the USA.

It is theoretically conceivable that there are or have been societies in which values learned in childhood, taught as a pattern, and reinforced by structured controls, serve to predict the bulk of the everyday behaviour of members and to account for prevailing conformity to norms. However, it is easier to describe the model than to discover societies which make a good fit with the model.[83]

Lemert prefers a model of a pluralistic society, in which different groups and associations negotiate compromises and reach contingent accommodations that derive, if at all, only at several removes from a consensus over some ultimate values.

One objection to Merton's view of choice and action by individuals is that it simplifies something enormously complex. Instead of seeing the individual as a relatively free agent making adaptations pointed toward a consistent value order, it is far more realistic to visualise him as 'captured' . . . by the claims of various groups to which he has given his allegiance [familial, occupational, religious, ethnic, and political ties are what Lemert has in mind, *inter alia*]. It is in the fact that these claims are continually being preemptively asserted through group action at the expense of other claims, frequently in direct conflict, that *we find the main source of 'pressures' on individuals in modern society*, rather than in 'cultural emphasis on goals'.[84]

[82] E. Lemert, 'Social Structure, Social Control and Deviation', 60.

[83] Ibid. 63–4. [84] Ibid. 68.

It is possible to refine Merton's conception to take account of Lemert's quite distinct model of social structure and culture: but only at the cost of reducing the intensity of the 'strain' induced by the goals–means discrepancy to far milder levels than he proposed.

Secondly, Merton's theory neglects altogether the implications of social control for the shaping of deviant behaviour. Lemert's critique takes two major forms: one, the need to allow theoretically for the promotion of 'active' as well as 'passive' social control; and two, the need to differentiate between 'primary' and 'secondary' deviation. 'Active social control' refers to the growing organizational tendency in complex industrial societies with a high rate of technologically induced growth to regulate activity in purely instrumental ways. For example, the regulation of pollution, industrial safety, traffic, and commercial and financial transactions is only negligibly concerned with the imputation of stigmas and moral evaluations, and is primarily designed to enforce minimum standards of compliance that do not signally interfere with production and profits. Innovation, far from emerging as a 'deviant or non-conforming response of structurally disadvantaged individuals',

> has become organised or institutionalised in our society . . . Nowhere is the contingent nature of deviation made more apparent than in the action of government regulatory agencies with adjudicative and punitive powers in situations where they are confronted by consequences of technological and organisational change. Large areas of action to do with business, finance, health, labor, housing, utilities, safety and welfare are subject to control through administrative rules discontinuous in origin and form from the culturally derived norms which impressed Merton and others seeming to favor a conception of passive social control.[85]

In other words, an increasing proportion of control activity is 'active' and cannot be seen to flow in any simple or direct fashion from 'the norms' that are presumed to inhere in patterns of childhood socialization.

'Passive social control', however, still operates in the sphere of the 'sacred': and it is in this respect still potent in the operation of the criminal justice system. Moral character and 'status degra-

[85] E. Lemert, 'Social Structure, Social Control and Deviation', 89–91.

dation' remain part of the armoury that produces 'secondary deviation', i.e. 'how deviant acts are symbolically attached to persons and the effective consequences of such attachment for subsequent deviation on the part of the person'.[86] In such secondary deviation, 'the original "causes" of the (primary) deviation recede and give way to the central importance of the disapproving, degradational, and isolating reactions of society'.[87] Lemert holds this to be 'pragmatically the more pertinent' a research problem, and one to which anomie theory has as yet contributed nothing. To put it crudely, it may be that the majority of people 'steal', but only a minority become processed as 'thieves': anomie theory alerts us to possible reasons for the former, but precludes analysis of the processes underlying the latter proposition.

In a more structurally inclined critique of Merton, Gouldner makes the point that more follows from the malintegration of goals and means than appears in even the revised statements of the theory.

> The allocation of the means to succeed and, with this, of position in the class system, is in appreciable part a function of the institution of private property and its hereditary or testamentary transmission. Thus the distribution of anomic responses is a function of this institution. But it does not follow that those on the top of the class system are less anomic, if by this is meant that they have more of a genuine belief in and devotion to their culture's moral values. Indeed, there is reason to predict that their genuine commitment to these moral values is undermined by the very institution from which they derive their advantages. For this institution makes it possible for them to sever the connections between gratification and conformity to cultural values . . . In short, the spoiler of the society's morality is . . . 'vested interest', the right to do something for nothing.[88]

To this critical catalogue, we would wish to add only three more problems. Firstly, although he later attempted to plug the gap,[89] Merton ignored the reverse situation to the malintegration of goals and means that occurs when results *exceed* expectations. The 'anomie of success' is again more prevalent at the top than the bottom of the system, and applies whether the success is 'earned' or not. The overnight 'star', the unexpected 'bestseller', the

[86] Ibid. 82. [87] Ibid. 81; see also Ch. 7 on interactionism.
[88] A. Gouldner, *The Coming Crisis*, 325.
[89] R. Merton, in M. Clinard, *Anomie and Deviant Behavior*, 219–22.

'pools winner' are arguably candidates for anomie just as much as the relative failures (though data exist which cast doubt on this response for one group of pools winners in Britain[90]). A second problem is the difficulty of conceptualizing the chronology of anomie and deviance. Once formulated, deviant adaptations exist in the world as social institutions possessing some degree of stability and continuity. They may be encountered before any exposure to the 'strain to anomie' has occurred. However, if the 'solution' is embraced before the 'problem' is encountered, as described, for example, in Whyte's depiction of neighbourhood rackets in an Italian-American slum, then the experience of anomie is pre-empted.[91] It becomes a purely structural property without subjective counterpart. The problem of investigating anomie empirically may therefore elude available methodologies, since the only indicators of anomie that remain are its presenting symptoms, such as high rates of crime and delinquency.[92] The circularity is well demonstrated in Lander's study of Baltimore, in which the best predictors of delinquency could not be adequately disentangled from the best predictors of anomie. And, finally, there is the problem raised by Albert Cohen and Arthur Stinchcombe. Anomie seems to be conceived as the outcome of a yawning gap between aspiration and the prospect of final achievement. It is presumably most grievous in its effects on ambitious but disadvantaged young people who cast ahead to auger their life-chances. But it appears that people actually tend not to project their lives very far ahead. Indeed, Stinchcombe argued that adolescents plan only a little into the future.[93] Expectations and motives are frequently confined to limited periods of time, shifting with each significant turning-point in the life cycle. Experiences, perspectives, projects, and acquaintances interact and evolve continuously, and ambition and explanations of failure are significant parts of that phased growth. They are not usually set but emergent, they are often short-term, and anomic disjunction itself may not be as profound as Merton claimed. To be sure, there are groups whose deprivation is so great that their frustration can never be modulated. But it is not

[90] S. Smith and P. Razzell, *The Pools Winners*. [91] W. Whyte, *Street Corner Society*.

[92] Merton and Srole distinguished *anomie* as a systemic property from *anomia* as a psychological state. This differentiation does not resolve the problem as we see it here.

[93] A. Stinchcombe, *Rebellion in a High School*.

clear whether anomie theory is intended to refer chiefly to them or to others whose lives are rather too complicated to be captured so simply.

Conclusion

It may well be the case, as Douglas argues, that Durkheim's methodology is flawed, but that does not invalidate the general support for his theory that can be drawn from a revised view of the official statistics. Douglas's alternative method 'for determining and analysing the communicative actions which can be observed and replicated in real-world cases of suicide' remains obscure, beyond the examination of suicide notes and the like. Indeed, it was the limitations of such methods that led Durkheim to focus on the rates as alone capable of providing sufficient evidence for analysis. The two methods are, in certain respects, quite compatible. As Atkinson's work testifies, however, there are perhaps intractable problems involved in a reliance on the rates alone.[94] While empirical support for Durkheim's theory remains mixed, it is still a formidable source for theory and research.

Merton's application of the concept draws both its strengths and its weaknesses from his Americanization of anomie. The weaknesses stem from too facile an acceptance of the official rates of deviance, and too standardized a view of the prevalence of the American Dream. But 'Americanization' remains a real phenomenon, as generations of immigrants from diverse cultures were and are subject to a relatively unbridled ideology of egalitarian consumerism. The content and consequence of these processes have been, if anything, too little researched and explored. Jules Henry echoed Merton and elaborated on the theme of 'money-success' in writing: 'In contemporary America children must be trained to *insatiable* consumption of *impulsive* choice and *infinite* variety.'[95] The impact and nature of the collective representations of advertising remain relatively unknown, but such evidence as we have gives point to Merton's thesis. Nor is the imputed effect confined to America: all consumer societies have experienced rising rates of crime and delinquency in the context of growing affluence; and anomie theory remains one of

[94] M. Atkinson, *Discovering Suicide*. [95] J. Henry, *Culture Against Man*, 70.

the most plausible attempts to account for this seeming paradox.[96] In the most systematic review of the evidence to date, Braithwaite concluded that it supported 'a strong *prima facie* case . . . that reducing inequalities of wealth and power will reduce crime'.[97]

Lemert may be right in proposing the general inadequacy of anomie theory in any simple sense to convey the processes involved in deviance and control. His own critique, however, fails to differentiate between social change resulting from innovation that falls *within* the realm of institutional means, and social change resulting from innovation which does not. An example of the latter is the extent to which the 'hidden economy' is producing considerable distortions in taxation and consumption by comparison with the 'formal economy'.[98] Lemert seems in this and other respects to miss the point of Merton's analysis. Even planned social change can disrupt lives for the worse, for example, the unemployment that can result from technological obsolescence falls unevenly on the population, and for those adversely affected, the goals–means equation is arguably subject to sharp deterioration. It remains an empirical question as to whether that promotes higher rates of deviance, of whatever kind. In sum, though substantial revision is in order, there is a great deal of unexplored mileage in anomie theory, whichever version we prefer.

[96] Experience in England and Wales may offer a test of sorts between these versions of anomie theory. Ten years after the end of World War 2, crime rates were actually lower than in 1945. After their single sharp rise, of 15% in 1950–51, they fell back below their 1945 level. After 1955, they began their almost uninterrupted climb of 5–6% annually. Durkheim's theory (which was admittedly of suicide rather than crime, but which is conventionally applied to both) does not fit very well with so sharp a rise in crime rates in the middle of the Korean war—in which Britain was fully engaged—and while a tough regulatory framework, the culture of rationing, was still largely in place. Merton's theory fits the trends far better: people put up with post-war austerity in the glow of victory and post-war reconstruction. But by 1950, when their patience wore thin, the austerity was prolonged by a far distant war. Aspirations shot ahead of reality. With the election of the Conservatives in 1951 and the Korean armistice, rationing finally ended and, for a few years at least, reality outpaced aspirations. By the mid-1950s, the 'never-had-it-so-good' society was born, and aspirations began to soar, if not infinitely, then at least indefinitely. Unlike all other European parties of the Left, Labour have been dogged ever since by the aura of delivering the Good but not the goods.

[97] J. Braithwaite, *Inequality, Crime and Public Policy*.

[98] See e.g. S. Henry, *The Hidden Economy*.

6

Culture and Subculture

Introduction

Attempts to explain and understand social deviance, in particular juvenile delinquency, in terms of adherence to distinctive cultural patterns became commonplace in the 1960 and 1970s, although at first it was considered somewhat novel even to link the two concepts. It was also considered scientific, in so far as sociologists, with respectful nods in the direction of anthropology, sought to divide up the population in relation to their parent class cultures, varieties of subcultures, and burgeoning countercultures, each with their distinctive norms, values, and beliefs, each with a clear-cut relationship to the others, all invested with a degree of clarity which consigned any lingering doubts about the reality of all this cultural attribution to the margin. It is all too easy, in retrospect, to see this body of work as a somewhat mechanical attempt to pin down the unpinnable: cultures as they are lived. But there were real gains none the less, not least the establishing of the proposition that the most apparently senseless and meaningless forms of aggressive delinquency could be rendered intelligible and rational by taking account of their authors' 'definitions of the situation', and by conceiving of delinquency as a solution, rather than as a problem, to dilemmas that they faced.

We shall argue that there was an excessively schematic quality about the subcultural theories of delinquency of this period. It was held that society, whether American, as in the work of Albert Cohen, Cloward and Ohlin, and Miller, or British, as in the work of Mays, Downes, and Hargreaves, could be clearly layered and categorized into classes, sectors, age-groups, and sex-roles.[1]

[1] A. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys*; R. Cloward and L. Ohlin, *Delinquency and Opportunity*; W. Miller, 'Lower Class Culture as a Generating Milieu of Gang Delinquency', 5–19; J. Mays, *Growing Up in the City*; D. Downes, *The Delinquent Solution*; D. Hargreaves, *Social Relations in a Secondary School*.