A Social Ethics Approach to Social Problems

*There are many who would sacrifice much for their children,
fewer for their grandchildren.*

—Robert Heilbroner, *Twenty-first Century Capitalism*

I HOPE THIS TEXTBOOK will guide students to acquire:

1. a sociological understanding of contemporary social problems and accurate information about them;
2. awareness of their social origins, collective definition, and how they might be effectively treated;
3. discernment on the importance of sociological theory, methods, and multilevel analyses;
4. a social ethics approach to public policy addressing social problems;
5. social activism—a commitment to positive change in society and in the larger global community.

This is, perhaps, the age of moral ambiguity. More and more, isolated individuals, disconnected from external moral reference points, have come to view themselves as the sole judge of moral decisions. In fact, 93 percent of all

Americans report that they alone determine what is moral in their lives. What has happened to what has classically been referred to as society's "collective conscience" or "moral consensus" (what Durkheim, [1893] 1964, called "mechanical solidarity")? Accordingly, morality is collectively constructed, not individual, in nature. What holds society together are the emotional bonds that foster a sense of obligation or duty to social good. Ideally, these bonds prevail over purely selfish, private, egotistic motives (Cortese & Mestrovic, 1990; Cortese, 1990; Durkheim [1912] 1965: 482). Émile Durkheim ([1897] 1951) discovered that individuals with low social integration are linked to high rates of suicide.

As a consequence of this lack of collective aspect of moral support, Americans are increasingly coming to view the key moral issues of the day as "gray"—without a clear right and wrong. More than one-third of Americans believe there is no clear right or wrong position when it comes to the following issues: affirmative action (54 percent); creationism in schools (52 percent); the right to die (44 percent); school busing (44 percent); homosexuality (43 percent); flag burning (38 percent); pornography (38 percent); and capital punishment (37 percent).

SOCIAL PROBLEMS: A HISTORICAL APPROACH

During the late nineteenth century, the United States (as well as Western Europe) was undergoing rapid and basic social change. Such changes resulted in a variety of social problems. Flourishing industrial cities in the Northeast and North Central states produced a regular flow of migration and rural inhabitants who were tugged by the prospect of decent employment. Surges of immigrants from other countries also gushed into the United States for basically similar reasons.

The hopes of these newcomers were dashed by the stark contrast between expectations and the actual conditions they encountered in the cities. Their poor economic situation forced them to reside in crowded crime-infested ethnic ghettos. They labored in dangerous conditions and faced an often-antagonistic social climate. There was also cultural conflict and economic competition among the different new residents of the cities. The new discipline of sociology, with its scientific method to social interaction, human groups, and society, was perfectly geared to examining the urgent social problems of the time. Sociologists began to study how social and physical environments affect individuals and groups.

Some of these original social problems are still with us today: Poverty, crime, unemployment, inadequate health care, homelessness, racial and ethnic conflict, education, and gender inequality. Today, there are still many people who arrive in the United States crossing international boundaries and aspiring to a better life. However, because of scant education and employment skills, language obstacles, and ethnic stereotypes, immigrants soon become stuck in destitute poverty. Undocumented workers cross the border between the United States and Mexico only to struggle with life circumstances similar to those who emigrated from Mexico nearly one hundred years ago.

Certainly, this pervasive pattern is not universal for immigrants. *Ethnic enclave theory* is based on the notion that immigrant workers may be part of a special type of economy that provides unusual routes of upward mobility (Portes, 1981; Wilson & Martin, 1982; Butler & Wilson, 1988). It is rooted in community solidarity, a reserve of disadvantaged ethnic laborers, and vertical and horizontal integration. An ethnic enclave is a grouping of immigrants who organize a variety of business enterprises (Portes & Bach, 1985: 203).

At the top of the stratification system are those who have jobs within the enclave that are parallel to those in the mainstream economy (Butler, 1991: 30). Examples of ethnic enclave economies include the ones developed by the Cubans in Miami and Los Angeles, the Japanese in Honolulu and Los Angeles (Logan, Alba, & McNulty, 1994: 717), and the Jewish experience (Portes & Bach, 1985: 203).

The contemporary structures of racial, ethnic, and gender inequality are rooted in previous societal processes and cultural patterns. These social problems must be understood within their particular historical and cultural context. The fact that working black men and women today earn significantly less than white males is based, in part, on historical institutional discrimination against blacks and women. Connections between past social problems and present ones are not unusual.

Intervention to alleviate social problems can have damaging unintended consequences resulting in new and startling problems. For example, in the 1920s moral entrepreneurs who viewed alcohol use as immoral successfully lobbied against the manufacture, sale, and consumption of alcohol. Instead of stopping people from drinking, the new legislation boosted organized criminals who profited tremendously from the illegal manufacturing, distribution, and sale of alcohol. Moreover, during Prohibition many people died from drinking tainted alcohol. Although the intent of banning alcohol was moral regeneration, it resulted in expanded criminal activity and lawlessness.

Some present-day social problems are unlike previous problems. The identical industrial economy in the United States that produced millions of new jobs and a modernized lifestyle for much of the population also grievously polluted our natural environment—arguably the most critical social problem in contemporary society as well as a central political issue.

Some relatively recent social problems, on the other hand, have emerged from conditions that have existed for quite a while. It is fruitful to examine a variety of social problems not only sociohistorically but also in a cross-cultural perspective, for various reasons. Foremost, intervention in social problems in one society can have a further effect on social dynamics and problems in another. When American firms ship low-wage, low-skill, and dangerous jobs to developing countries, they are essentially responding to domestic problems (economic recession, pollution, and hazardous work environments) by shifting them to other nations. A cross-cultural examination of social problems is also consequential because many of the problems we now encounter are global, affecting many, if not most, human societies.

THINKING SOCIOLOGICALLY

Sociology is based on the assumption that individuals belong to groups. These groups influence our attitudes and behavior. This includes the groups to which we belong as well as those to which we aspire to belong. Groups take on characteristics independent of its members. Consequently, the group is greater than the sum of its individual members. Sociologists focus on the behavior patterns of groups. We are particularly interested in different patterns based on ethnicity, race, gender, age, social class, and religion.

Sociologists use various theories and methods to scientifically study social problems. The sociological perspective is very different than intuitive, commonsense, and media approaches to social problems. *Research methods* are techniques for systematically collecting and analyzing information; they include data-gathering techniques such as surveys, observation, and experiments. Research methods also include statistical techniques that allow sociologists to classify and interpret patterns in the data gathered.

A *sociological theory* is a systematic explanation of social relationships, processes, and arrangements that can be examined using research methods. Using these tools, sociologists are able to dig beneath the exterior and investigate social problems systematically and in-depth, pushing well beyond often misleading, inaccurate, and incomplete commonsense understanding.

Sociologists can employ theory and methods to better understand social problems on two different levels: micro and macro. A *micro-level* approach to social problems includes taking a close-up look at social relationships and social structure, focusing on details. Micro-level approaches study small-group behavior. Thus, the sociologist places social problems and human individuals affected by them under a figurative microscope for close examination.

Macro-level analyses, in contrast, are big-picture approaches. They focus on the totality of society. Macro-level approaches are like using a wide-angle lens to view social problems, including the context of the problem within the frame. Both micro-level and macro-level approaches are needed to provide distinct insights and thoroughly understand social problems. Consequently, I fuse together both approaches in the chapters in this book.

From a micro-level perspective, the problem of poverty would be inspected by assessing how individual traits and characteristics of the poor contribute to their poverty, as well as how individuals and families are affected by poverty. Correspondingly, a macro-level approach would analyze the problem of poverty by assessing the impact of poverty on a larger social system and the social institutions that comprise it. *Institutions* are collections of norms, roles, and values fitted into a patterned organized way of living. Major social institutions include the economy, politics, education, family, religion, and the military.

Sociological theories can be classified according to their theoretical perspectives. Sociological perspectives are classifications of theory that furnish comprehensive beginning points about society, social processes, and social interaction. Sociological theory can be classified as structural-functional, social conflict, or symbolic interaction. The structural-functionalist and social-conflict paradigms are macro-level oriented, while the symbolic interaction paradigm involves micro-level analyses.

Structural-functionalist theory views society as a complex system of interdependent parts that work together (Maciones, 2002). Structural-functionalists view society as a relatively stable system. The major parts of this system are institutions—major spheres of social life, or societal subsystems, organized to meet a basic human need (Maciones, 2002). The functions of social structures that are intended and widely recognized are called "manifest functions." Those which are unintended and less well-known are called "latent functions." The negative functions of social patterns are called "dysfunctions."

Early functionalism viewed society as a living organism, giving rise to a social pathology model. Accordingly, social problems are occasional disturbances or disruptions in society's normal operation—just as a medical illness disrupts

the normal operation of a human being. Social problems are analyzed in terms of their impact on the whole of society. The structural-functional model investigates social problems as bad or dysfunctional for the entire society, not just for the individuals who suffer from them.

The structural-functional view, fascinatingly, justifies the continuation of some social problems by maintaining that they, in fact, contribute to the stability of society. Although these negative conditions harm individuals or segments of society such as the family, the economy, or ethnic groups, the structural-functional model observes them as supplying society with something positive, albeit often indirectly.

A structural-functionalist approach to poverty, for example, concedes the negative results of poverty on individuals. However, it simultaneously emphasizes some important purposes or functions for society as a whole. This may involve provoking the majority of society's members to work hard or at least find a route to escape from poverty. Keeping part of the population poor also guarantees a reserve of desperate, destitute people unable to acquire more than low-wage, dislikable, and dangerous jobs. Poverty also provides an outlet for philanthropists.

The *social-conflict model* views society as divided by inequality and conflict (Maciones, 2002). Poverty, according to social conflict theory, is an outcome of competition for scarce and valuable resources such as wealth, power, and status. For that reason, poverty results from social divisions between the haves and the have-nots. Poor people are badly losing the battle for society's rewards. One cannot view the nonsuccess of people living in poverty without recognizing the link to their handicapped position relative to those of others within the larger society. The social-conflict perspective suggests that the fundamental arrangements and cultural characteristics of the social system produce advantages for some people while others are disadvantaged; this is a macro-level approach.

The social-conflict model sees poverty as a condition brought about by dominant groups bent on self-promotion who accumulate a lopsided portion of scarce and valuable resources. Social problems such as environmental pollution are harmful to the greater social system and are a consequence of the decisions and conduct of controlling groups who chase after their own financial success. Persisting social problems can be interpreted from this perspective by observing that the behavior that results in them are advantageous to dominant groups in society. Pollution, for instance, has become a persisting social problem because the expenses to advantaged groups of eliminating it are perceived as too costly.

Social conflict chiefly occurs along class, ethnic, racial, and gender lines. Karl Marx's theory of class struggle is an example of social problems based on socioeconomic conflict. How else could a society so affluent have so many who are so destitute? Capitalism is an economic mode of production in which companies are privately owned by people who manage them for profit. The business owners making up the capitalist class are able to produce enough food and material goods for everyone and, thus, end poverty and other types of social misery. However, greed and profit come before the basic needs of the working class; this generates and maintains poverty and other social problems such as homelessness, poor education, poor health care, and, for some, the need to turn to criminal activity for basic needs. Class social-conflict theorists support a drastic restructuring of society as the best means to address social ills.

Conflict can also be based on skin color and culture. Multiculturalists view social problems in terms of ethnic and racial inequality. Historically, racial and ethnic minorities have been, and currently remain, disadvantaged—at higher risk of poverty, poor health, street violence, homelessness, poor education, as well as other social problems. The structures of racial and ethnic inequality bestow high status on some people, particularly white Anglo-Saxon Protestants, while failing to recognize others (particularly people of color). The persistence of racial and ethnic prejudice suggests that some people view the very presence of minorities in their communities as a social problem.

The structure of gender inequality is also pervasive. Women—especially single women and their children—suffer more from poverty and many other social problems because society historically gave, and continues to give, men economic, political, and social advantages over women. This amounts to affirmative action for men, especially white men.

Feminists (those who favor social equality for women and men) view social problems as men's domination over and oppression of women. Even though the social, economic, and political standing of women and men has begun to approach equality during the twentieth century, women working full time still earn just 73 percent as much as men do (Maciones, 2002). In addition to higher rates of poverty than men, females—from childhood to old age—also are often subject to violence at the hands of men.

The social-conflict paradigm currently overshadows other approaches in the examination of social problems. Yet perhaps the significance of social divisions is given too much weight. After all, technological advances have resulted in a noticeable increase in the standard of living for society's members.

Ethnic minorities and women have had greater opportunities than in the past. The recent rise of a black and Latino middle class in the past thirty-five years demonstrates economic and social upward mobility for ethnic minorities.

Social-conflict theory surrenders scientific objectivity for political activism. Nevertheless, structural-functionalism is also political in the sense that it supports the status quo. Both structural-functionalism and social-conflict theory depend on imprecise sweeping statements far removed from how individuals actually come into contact with their world. This apprehension has led to the growth of a third major approach: symbolic-interactionism.

The third important theoretical paradigm in sociology, *symbolic interaction*, sees society as the product of individuals interacting with one another (Maciones, 2002). It seeks to make sense of how people understand their own lives. Symbolic-interactionism has a sharply distinct view of social problems, suggesting that social problems are subjective. They are constructed through the negotiations of social interaction.

Learning theory suggests that people learn attitudes and behaviors within specific cultural or subcultural environments. Symbolic-interactionism also examines how people socially construct reality. Labeling theory proposes that the reality of any particular situation depends on how people define it. People often label others based simply on who they are.

Symbolic-interactionists also analyze why some actions are labeled deviant while others are not. The labeling theory of social deviance addresses why particular forms of crime, while less expensive and menacing to society, are seen as more serious than other varieties of crime that may be limited or have less of an effect on human beings. People are much more worried about property crimes such as theft than the white-collar crimes such as embezzlement. The public's labeling of and direct response to negative conditions are what results in the collective definition of social problems.

Symbolic-interactionism contributes a micro, "street-level" dimension to the study of social problems. Nevertheless, by emphasizing the tremendous variability in every day, this approach ignores or fails to recognize how the structure of class, ethnicity, race, and gender molds and controls individual lives. In other words, labeling and the construction of reality occur within a particular social structure.

In summary, the structural-functional and social-conflict paradigms operate at the macro level, while symbolic-interactionism operates at the micro level. According to structural-functionalism, society is a system of interrelated parts, all of which contribute to its overall operation. It proposes that society

is basically good and views problems as the result of deficient people, too-rapid social change, or dysfunctional consequences.

Social-conflict theory views society as a system of social inequality, whereby some benefit at the expense of others. It claims that problems stem from inequality in terms of class, ethnicity, race, and gender. Symbolic-interactionism conceptualizes society as arising from the ongoing interaction of individuals. People's perceptions of reality are alterable and shifting. It stresses how people learn attitudes and behaviors and how people may or may not define situations as problems.

Each of the three sociological paradigms offer unique advantages for examining social problems, including why they persevere and how we can eliminate or, at least, lessen them. The chapters in this book are representative of various sociological theories. I use multiple levels of analysis and composite theoretical perspectives to analyze social issues that have been labeled "social problems."

THE PROBLEM WITH "UNIVERSAL" ETHICS

Superior morality is always the morality of the superior.

—Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization*

Much of modern ethical thought is based on universality. Accordingly, there are ethical prescriptions that compel every person to internalize them as right and, consequently, to accept them as obligatory. For lawmakers, universality means a blanket application of a set of rules or laws in the territory over which their authority stretches.

Since its inception, the Frankfurt School set about to evaluate the classic works of the Enlightenment tradition as well as social theorists such as Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud. This included borrowing from these references, yet at the same time, remaining critical of them and of modern society—thus, the name *critical theory*. Critical theorists, such as Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor Adorno, exposed the deceptions of modern culture by which the vision of a universal ethics based on Western ideals imposes itself and thus restricts human freedom.

Jürgen Habermas, arguably the most important critical theorist today, like his predecessors, is critical of the Enlightenment tradition with its menacing enticement to reduce humanity into a unidimensional whole devoid of real differences. Despite his critical stance, Habermas has a deep, abiding

respect for the liberating and community-building potential of human be-ings. This position is called "radical modernism" because it attempts to find the liberating potential in modern culture.

I use social ethics to offer a case for doubting Habermas. Does the modern world still realistically offer what, for so long, it has promised? The gloomy realities of the modern world, at the beginning of the present millennium are difficult to overlook.

- The terrorist threat of weapons of mass destruction.
- Personal income, around the globe, is declining nearly at the same rate as economic productivity and cumulative wealth are growing.
- Continuous working employment—jobs productive of personal income and benefits sufficient to support family life are disappearing for the majority.
- Social and economic inequalities are growing worse, not better—most dramatically in the United States, which the modern world had always looked up to as the land of opportunity.
- Food supplies are declining to their lowest levels in decades with world grain reserves dropping to just forty-eight days' worth at current consumption levels.
- Social conflict—from violence against women and children to ethnic, class, and racial conflict—is pandemic.

The modern world guarantees human rights, individual freedom, economic and moral progress, and social equality. In the lack of which, individuals now correctly marvel why they encounter so much inequality, hunger and disease, poverty, oppression, and civil disharmony. The modernist views the glass as half full. The postmodernist views the glass as half empty. I view the glass, simply, as too large.

I concur with the postmodern challenge to the myth of social and moral progress. Zygmunt Bauman (1998) proposes a postmodern ethics that embraces social diversity and cultural pluralism. According to *cultural pluralism*, ethnic sub-cultures are maintained and celebrated; at the same time, various ethnic groups share societal resources and institutional arrangements, as well as a general culture. This articulated vision, of course, does not square with the preponderance of genocide, terrorism, and urban violence in our world today.

Postmodern ethics is accommodating, to a fault. It is excessively relativistic and eclectic, receiving many voices and perspectives. Postmodern ethicists stress tolerance but, ironically, are critical of a "privileged" point of view. Postmodern ethics can be liberating and minority-friendly. But postmodern ethics is not satisfying. It is not able to evaluate what course of action should

be taken when confronted with competing stances, for example, on key social issues such as health-care delivery, poverty, affirmative action, and education.

Postmodernists believe, sincerely but naively, that dialogue itself will resolve the obstacle. This does little to help the victims of social policy who appear to require immediate assistance and response. Consequently, postmodern ethics is irresponsible and incapable. The goal of this project is to provide a critical way out of this ambiguous, regretful predicament in contemporary social theory as well as implications for social policy based on a social ethics of distributive justice, equity, and fairness.

THE PROBLEM WITH RELATIVISTIC ETHICS

The basic problem with relying on a relativistic ethics is that we are left with shifting bases of decision rules or principles by which to judge whether we or whether society is acting "ethically." There is a basic consensus among different ethnic and religious ethics—that is to say, consensus among the ethical principles of Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus. Moreover, the U.N.'s charter and other articles support human rights as well as some implicit universalistic principles for solving social problems around the world. From this opportunity, I derive a common set of principles of social ethics for public policy. Most ethnic and religious cultures have overlapping prescriptions and proscriptions (moral codes approximating the Ten Commandments). Ethical principles condemning killing, stealing, or coveting thy neighbor's goods or wife can also be used as principles for determining whether a particular social policy is ethical.

The give-and-take model of conflict resolution always leaves opponents as part-winners and part-losers. A new model is needed. I propose the principles of equity, distributive justice and fairness for a social ethics approach to public policy. This new collaborative model is a win–win strategy based on human and civil rights.

A SOCIAL ETHICS APPROACH TO PUBLIC POLICY

Justice is an essential theme in social life. To be sure, the notion of justice as fairness underscores the claims of legitimacy by a society's social and political institutions (Greenberg & Cohen, 1982). When such claims start to lose their legitimacy, social change usually occurs. At the same time, the issue of social justice in everyday life is pervasive. However, the definition of justice and its guidelines for rules of ethical conduct may vary considerably between

subcultural groups. This raises the important issue: Is a universal justice possible? Is there a "fair-treatment" policy for subculturally diverse people? Is there "fair play" in decision making involving ethnic minorities?

Minority groups have a culture of their own—a *subculture*, with a distinct set of values (Meyers, 1984). Each ethnic minority group has its own unique *ethical ideology*—systematic belief systems about what one ought to do or who one ought to be. The negation of subcultural values and related ethical ideology places *majority groups* in the elitist position of asserting that they know what is good for a people even though those in question may not want it (Henshel, 1990). *Cultural relativism* (see Herskovits, 1972) observes the validity and equality of all cultures and, therefore, the right to cultural self-determination. The problem with cultural relativism is that it implies nonintervention or a laissez-faire approach to social problems. If all values are relative, there are no objective criteria in moral reasoning or in the definition of social problems.

Any discussion of human rights implies *universalistic ethics*—applicable to all people regardless of ethnicity, culture, social class, or gender. If one assumes a position of cultural relativism, nevertheless, ethical criteria become intuitive and insufficient. Thus, a tension emerges from the attempt to reconcile universal ethics or human rights with *pluralistic ethics* or moral relativism.

It is clear that just, good, or acceptable behavior varies tremendously across cultures (even between and within subcultures within a more general culture) and time. Happiness is achieved in exceedingly diverse ways that are fluid and subjective. Yet, a considerable degree of consensus or accord exists among the ways subcultures characterize extreme misery, torment, or suffering. This type of discourse allows one to move beyond cultural relativism by focusing on conditions of extreme misery, conditions on which there is substantial agreement. Such analyses can be gainfully applied to ethical issues in a subculturally diverse society.

SOCIAL ETHICS AND DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

No victory over inhumanity seems to have made the world safer for humanity.
—Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization*

There is a great deal of social inequality throughout the world, including within the United States. Distributive justice is a major ethical issue in a subculturally diverse society. On what basis do we distribute society's resources to people? What is the fairest way to assess need?—First-come, first-served?

The problem of distributive justice also emerges at a more basic level: How should society distribute resources that develop particular types of new procedures at the expense of others or that acquire new knowledge in some areas while ignoring others? We must consider that the resources used to fight terrorism are also needed to reduce gender and ethnic discrimination, urban decay, environmental pollution, and poverty and to improve the quality of education and accessibility to health care.

I propose an applied social ethics to use as a basis for law, social policy, and solving social problems. Social ethics is "a methodology of applying moral principles to social issues. The purpose is to clarify the moral principles and social goals inherent in social issues and public initiatives. It asserts that the relative strength of various moral claims can only be compared within the context of a particular social issue" (Winfrey, 1998: 2).

I apply distributive justice and social ethics to each social issue. In addition, I examine gender and ethnic issues for each topic. I favor a model that shuns dogmatic moral rules, respects ethical principles but not blind obedience to them, and carefully considers the fabric of realistic "trade-offs" in law and policy decisions without succumbing to the trap of relativism. We are left with a social ethics based on distributive justice, equity, and fairness.

THE GROWTH OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

The face and color of America's cities have greatly changed in the past sixty years, owing to the vast movement of blacks from the South to the North after World War II, a sharp increase in immigrants from Mexico and Latin America, and a constant flow of Asian newcomers, especially South Koreans and Filipinos. In 2000, Latinos became this country's largest ethnic minority (35,305,818; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001; see table 1.1). This represents 12.5 percent of the total U.S. population. Data on Latinos are conservative because they do not include undocumented immigrants who cross the border illegally. There are estimates that 46.2 percent of all Latinos who immigrate to the United States do so without legal documentation.

African Americans (34,658,190) are the second largest ethnic minority category in the United States, with 12.3 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001). Both the black and Latino populations are younger than the white population. Latinos and Asians are the fastest-growing minorities. Since 2000, half of all elementary school children in the United States are

TABLE 1.1
Social Standing of Ethnic and Racial Categories in the United States, 2000

Race/Ethnicity	Median Family Income	Percent in Poverty	Percent with 4 Years of College	Percent of Population	Actual #
Latino	$31,663	25.6	10.9	12.5	35,305,818
Mexican American	$31,000	27.1	7.1	8.3	23,337,000
Puerto Rican	$24,600	30.9	11.1	1.1	3,178,000
Cuban American	$42,800	13.6	24.8	0.5	1,412,000
African American	$31,778	23.6	15.4	12.3	34,658,190
Native American	$30,784	25.9	9.3	0.9	2,475,956
Asian/Pacific Islander	$56,316	10.7	36.0	3.6	10,242,998
Chinese American	$55,000	10.7	38.9	0.9	2,433,000
Filipino	—	—	—	0.7	2,000,000
Japanese American	$69,000	5.4	32.9	0.2	797,000
Asian Indian	—	—	—	0.6	1,679,000
Korean	$45,000	10.5	32.9	0.4	1,077,000
White (non–Latino)		8.0		75.1	211,460,626
Multiracial				2.4	6,826,228
Total	$48,950	11.8	25.2	100	281,422,000

Note: Percentages do not total 100 percent, and subcategories do not add up to the figures in the main categories, because of overlap between groups. Therefore, numbers and percentages should be considered approximations.

Source: U.S Census Bureau, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001.

now ethnic minorities; nearly half (44 percent) of all residents in the United States under the age of twenty are nonwhite (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

The United States has undergone racial change throughout its history, but never at the rate and mode happening now. Within the next fifty years, whites as a share of the total population will decline from 75 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) to just over 50 percent. The black population will increase in size but will remain at about 12 percent of the total population. Asians may increase from their present 3.6 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001) to 8 percent.

By 2050, Latinos will comprise about one-quarter of the U.S. population and blacks; less than one-sixth. Latinos are also the least educated ethnic group (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a; see table 1.1). Only 7.1 percent of all Mexican Americans have four or more years of college, compared with 15.4 percent of blacks, 9.3 percent of Native Americans (Maciones, 2002), 36 percent of Asians, and 25.2 percent of the entire population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a; table 1.1). Social responsibility requires us to examine how an increase of culturally diverse people directly or residually affects the larger society. Issues include poverty, housing, education, health care, crime, jurisprudence, prison, racism, sexism, and affirmative action.

ETHNIC ETHICS

Human social and cognitive development is largely an outcome of the child-rearing practices of the cultural subgroups that compose a modern complex society (Havighurst, 1976: 56). *Ethnic groups* are people who have a common history and generally share ways of life, including language, religion, country of origin, and social identity. They affect individuals through family activity, peer group, linguistic concepts, common literature, work in formal associations, in-group marriage, and residential and work segregation. *Social classes*, too, are pervasive and powerful in their influence on individuals (Maciones, 1996; Gordon, 1964: 52; Havighurst, 1976: 56). Ethnic groups, however, are also effective, more so at the lower- and working-class levels than at the middle- and upper-middle-class levels.

Sociologists use the term *subculture* to refer to the cultural patterns of any type of subgroup within the national society (Gordon, 1964: 38–39). Each ethnic group is a subculture with its own set of behaviors and attitudes (Havighurst, 1976: 56). Subcultures, nevertheless, do not exist in isolation. They affect and are affected by the general culture as well as other subcultures. One

may speak of the subculture of a neighborhood, a factory, a hospital, a university campus, or even a gang. Cohen's study (1955) of the cultural patterns of a delinquent gang uses this notion of subculture.

My (Cortese, 1990) critical approach to cognitive development theory addresses the humanizing effects of the ethnic and cultural sources of moral values. Morality is socially constructed, not based on rational principles of individuals (Cortese, 1989c). This alternative theory conflicts with the "universal" theories of morality and societal development as formulated by Immanuel Kant (1949), Jean Piaget ([1932] 1965), Lawrence Kohlberg (1969, 1981, 1984), John Rawls (1971), Jürgen Habermas (1984), and J. C. Harsanyi (1982).

Critiquing the cognitive-developmental model, I (Cortese, 1980, 1982a, 1982b, 1984a, 1989b, 1989c) examine social class, gender, and ethnic differences in moral judgment. This argument (Cortese, 1990) is situated in relation to both Kolbergian theory and the feminist critique of this theory (Gilligan, 1982).

The major thesis is that "moral judgment reflects the structure of social relations, not the structure of human cognition" (Cortese 1990: 4). The agenda is to

- explore the impact of ethnicity, culture, and language on moral development (Cortese & Mestrovic, 1990);
- elucidate conceptual problems linked to justice and objectivistic-subjectivistic tensions (Cortese & Mestrovic, 1990);
- identify methodological problems in the study of moral judgment (Cortese, 1984a, 1987, 1989a);
- clarify the relationship between Kohlberg's (1984) approach and sociological theory (Cortese, 1985).

This critique of Kohlberg (Cortese, 1986a) also challenges the moral theory of Habermas (1984): "Moral reasoning and behavior are determined largely by social factors—role demands, class interests, national policies, and ethnic antagonisms. One cannot be moral in an immoral social role, whatever one's childhood socialization, psychological predispositions, or commitment to abstract rational principles" (Cortese 1990: 2).

Social forces and individual cognition interact to shape moral judgment (Cortese, 1985). A pure structural framework cannot totally account for the wide range in moral reasoning among people in similar social roles. Yet it is important to focus on the ethnic origins of moral reasoning. Latinos and African Americans typically base their moral judgments on principles of responsibility, fidelity, and caring, vis-à-vis abstract principles of justice (Cortese, 1984b).

Kohlberg's work borrows from Piaget's ([1932] 1965) theory of cognitive moral development, Kant's (1949, 1950, 1963) philosophy of science, Rawls's (1971) theory of justice, and Durkheim's (1961) concept of morality. I (Cortese, 1990) adopt Mannheim's (1971) sociology of knowledge to criticize Kohlberg. Habermas makes extensive use of Kohlberg's ideas in his theory of communicative ethics. Habermas recognized that the implicit social evolutionary model in Kohlberg's stage theory fit nicely with his own developmental theory of communicative ethics and instrumental rationality.

The pivotal issue is the alleged universal generalizability Kohlberg attached to his six-stage developmental model. He presumed that as individuals mature they move from simplistic forms of moral reasoning to the use of more complex moral principles, although most never achieve the higher stages. Kohlberg's theory has spawned considerable research and controversy (Cortese, 1986b; Gilligan, 1982; Simpson, 1974).

Kohlberg's theory is, at best, a heuristic model and, at worst, false, because it ignores the fact that ethnic and cultural factors shape the moral development of individuals in ways that would make any universalized model of moral development fail when comparative testing was used (Cortese, 1990). While Kohlberg's hypothetical moral dilemmas were designed to test the ability to comprehend and implement more highly complicated forms of "justice," real-life decisions are complex and go beyond abstract questions of justice.

Kohlberg's moral dilemmas are unrealistic and depict situations as having rigid either/or choices and consequences (Cortese, 1984a). In particular, Latino and African American responses to moral questions reflect moral orientations often different from those of whites. Moreover, women's responses differ from those of men, indicating gender-specific socialization regarding moral reasoning (Gilligan, 1982). In the well-known Heinz Dilemma, a destitute man is faced with the choice of stealing a life-saving drug for his wife from a pharmacy or allowing her to die. I (Cortese, 1990) document how women focused on Heinz's care, responsibility, and love for his wife, not justice or rights, the intended focus of the question.

American ethnic minorities and those raised in non-Western cultures sometimes give responses that indicate alternative forms of moral reasoning. Labeling these alternate forms of reasoning morally inferior is ethnocentric. The Standard Issue Scoring system tends to favor complex reasoning and abstract dialogue; thus, alternate types of solutions are typically scored at the lower stages (Cortese, 1989a).

Kohlberg's (1984) presumption that individuals mature from lower, less sophisticated stages to higher, more complex ones exposes his theory to the criticisms of various forms of evolutionary frameworks. He created ideal types of discreet forms of moral reasoning and presumed an inevitable sequence of development, much as nineteenth-century anthropologists presumed that they had uncovered the inevitable sequence of social change that led from savagery to civilization. Habermas (1984) transformed Kohlberg's individual stages of moral growth into stages of increasingly rational societal communication.

CONCLUSION

It is urgent that social theorists, social ethicists, and policy makers address the types of social questions that have begun to emerge in postmodernity. I focus on economic inequality, cultural diversity, gender and ethnic discrimination, individual health and community welfare, and social policy. I hope to contribute to social ethics, public discourse, scholarly dialogue, humanistic understanding, law, and public policy.

A basic goal is to show how social structure and social processes affect individual attitudes and behavior. I provide an interpretation of social issues within a principled social ethics based on distributive justice, equity, and fairness. I apply sociological methods to hurdle misconceptions and ideological barriers and debunk cultural myths. Practical solutions to alleviate economic inequality and social conflict are offered.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

The discipline of sociology does not furnish ultimate conclusions about pressing social questions. Accordingly, a major goal of this text is to assist you in thinking critically about the topics presented. My objective is not to inform you what to think. There are no simple or "correct" solutions to these social problems.

Once one is able to use a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959), there are numerous potential paths for reacting to social arrangements, processes, and problems. Some of these will be specific with particular ramifications for social policy. Others appear unpractical, apparently separated from the physical and social milieux. My expectation is that the reader will choose a perspective and, perhaps, a course of action that fits one's own strengths and

interests. The objective of this book is to enhance your capacity to reflect critically on contemporary social problems.

Use sociological understanding to view yourself, analyzing your beliefs and values in terms of the particular social position you occupy. Following is a sample from one of my students:

My experiences in life and social class persuade me to view the world as just, honest, and peaceful. Social class is determined by economic indices such as occupation, education, and income. Further, our society also stratifies by skin color. Although I do not have my own income, I can relate my opportunities to my father's fortunes. I am a white female whose father's income is above average. I have received the best possible education all my life and assume to have a successful occupation in the future.

Although money or social class can't buy happiness, it has brought me a lot of opportunities to influence me to view the world as just. For example, my neighborhood consists of middle class, white families. Everyone in the area is a good role model and there is little rebellion, crime, anger, or revenge. I was not exposed to the neighborhood like the inmates [at the New Mexico State penitentiary (class field trip)] where I had to protect myself or my property. Therefore, I see the world as peaceful. Furthermore, since public schools are divided by districts, I went to a school with all of those motivated, positive people. Our school had plenty of funding (a fair share of taxes came to us) and we had excessive alumni and parental support.

In the school district across town, where most of the lower-class students attended, there was very little funding and support. Their lack of education led to other factors like crime, unemployment, and poor income while my school educated me and prepared me for the future. I haven't had to struggle to find jobs or internships and this influences my view of a just world.

Finally, my father's income allows me to have material items, as well as, opportunities. I have never had to struggle or save to buy something and I have never known a bill that wasn't paid. This security kept peace within my family. There was never struggles or arguments over who left the light on, who made a long-distance call, or who spent more on shopping or gambling. Financial issues cause domestic violence, abuse, and divorce. I have never faced these confrontations.

I know I have lived in a bubble, but at my level, you become naïve to what is happening in the rest of the world. I have never struggled financially. I have never experienced racism. I have never been involved in excessive violence. My parents are Mr. and Mrs. Brady and I am happy. Although others are struggling, my social class and experiences lead me to believe that this is a just world. Maybe I need a reality check!