

# Research Methods in Social Sciences

## 2

### *Theory and Research*

# Theory

/ˈθɪəri/

*noun*

A supposition or a system of ideas intended to explain something, especially one based on general principles independent of the thing to be explained<sup>1</sup>.



# Social Theory

*Social theory* is a system of interconnected ideas. It condenses and organizes knowledge about the social world. We can also think of it as a type of systematic “story telling” that explains how some aspect of the social world works and why<sup>2</sup>.

# Ideology

/ˌɪdɪˈɒlədʒi/

*noun*

A system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy.<sup>3</sup>

Greek

idea

*form, pattern*

Greek

-logos

*word, reason*

French

Idéologie

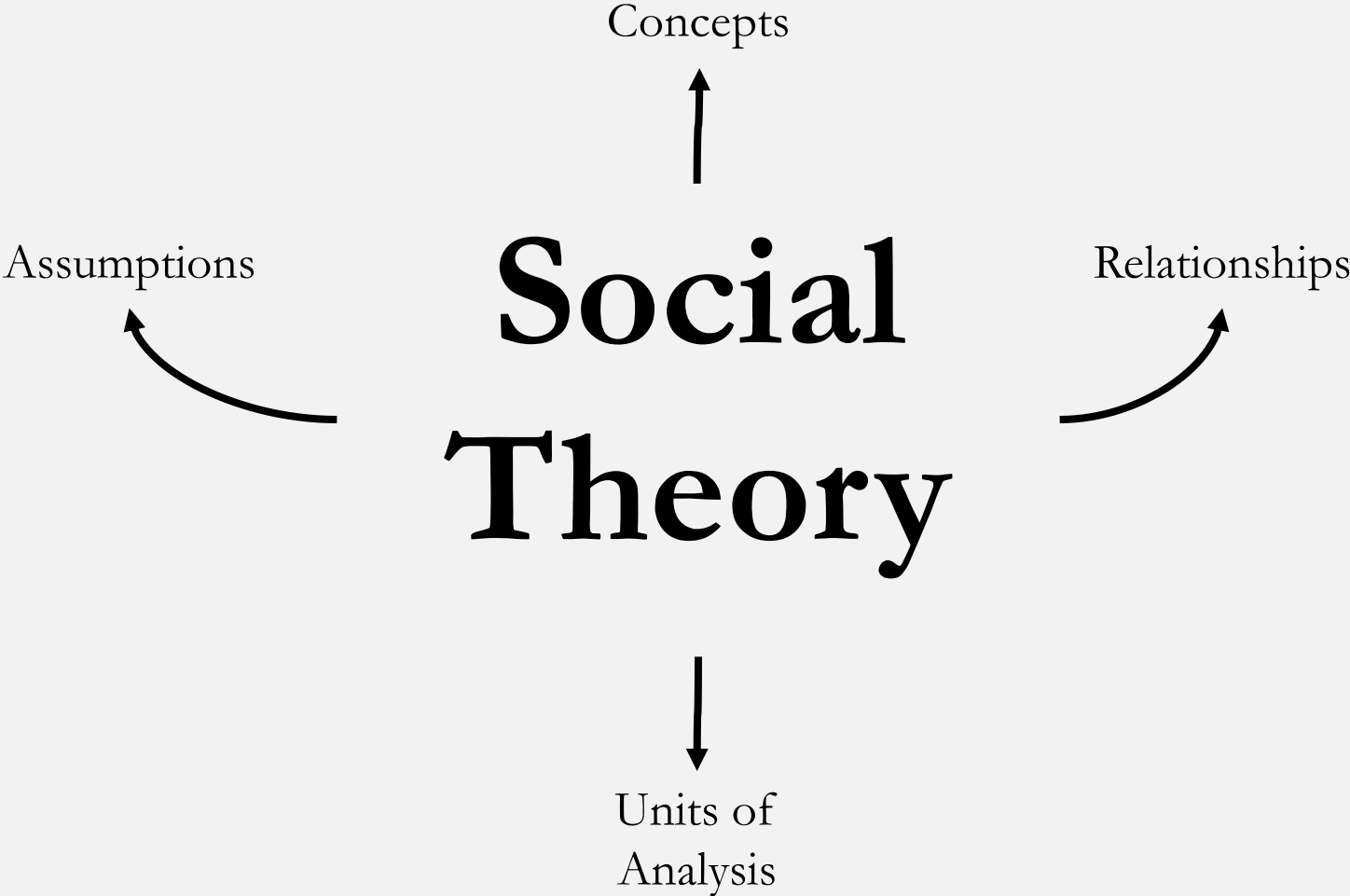
Ideology

*Late 18th Century*

# Ideology

A nonscientific quasi-theory, often based on political values or faith with assumptions, concepts, relationships among concepts, and explanations. It is a closed system that resists change, cannot be directly falsified with empirical data, and makes normative claims<sup>2</sup>.

	<u>Ideology</u>	<u>Theory</u>
1. <i>Certainty of answers.</i>	Absolute, certain answers with few questions	Tentative, conditional answers that are incomplete and open ended
2. <i>Type of knowledge system differs.</i>	Closed, fixed belief system	Open, expanding belief system
3. <i>Type of assumptions differ.</i>	Implicit assumptions based on faith, moral belief, or social position	Explicit, changing assumptions based on open, informed debate and rational discussion
4. <i>Use of normative statements differ.</i>	Merger of descriptive claims, explanations, and normative statements	Separation of descriptive claims, explanations, and normative statements
5. <i>Use of empirical evidence differs.</i>	Selective use of evidence, avoidance of direct tests of claims, resistance, denial, or ignorance of contrary evidence	Consideration of all evidence, seeking repeated tests of claims, changing, based on new evidence
6. <i>Demand for logical consistency differs.</i>	Contradictions and logical fallacies	Highest levels of consistency and congruity, avoiding logical fallacies
7. <i>Transparency differs.</i>	Avoidance of transparency	Encouragement of transparency

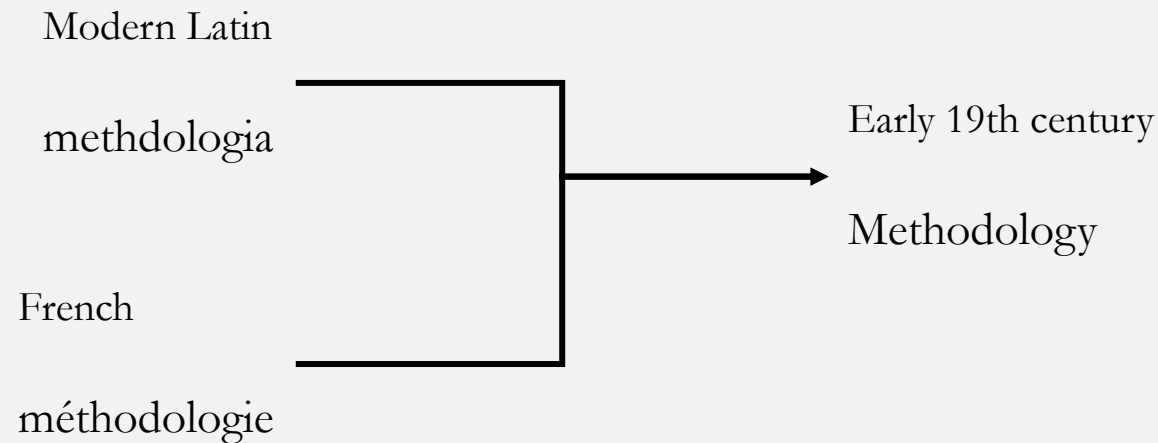


# Methodology

/mɛθəˈdɒlədʒi/

*noun*

A system of methods used in a particular area of study or activity<sup>4</sup>.

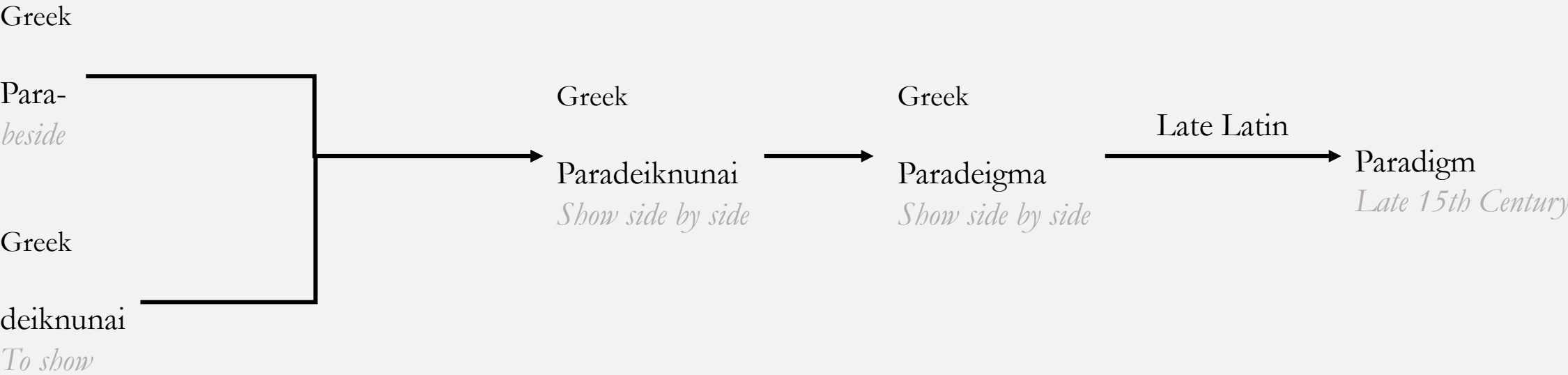




# Paradigm

*/'parədΛɪm/*  
*noun*

a typical example or pattern of something; a pattern or model<sup>5</sup>.



# Paradigm

A basic orientation to theory and research<sup>6</sup>.

A general organizing framework for theory and research that includes basic assumptions, key issues, models of quality research, and methods for seeking answers<sup>2</sup>.

***POSITIVIST  
SOCIAL  
SCIENCE***

***INTERPRETIVE  
SOCIAL  
SCIENCE***

***CRITICAL  
SOCIAL  
SCIENCE***

	POSITIVISM	INTERPRETIVE	CRITICAL
1. Reason for Reasearch	To discover natural laws so people can predict and control event	To understand and describe meaningful social action	To smash myths and empower people to change society
2. Nature of Social Reality	Stable preexisting patterns or order that can be discovered	Fluid definitions of a situation created by human interaction	Multiple layers and governed by hidden, underlying structures.
3. Human Nature	Self intested and rational individuals who are shaped by external forces	Social beings who create meaning and who constantly make sense of their worlds	Creative, adaptive people with unrealized potential, trapped by illusion.
4. Human agency	Powerful external social pressures shape people’s actions; free will is largely illusion	People have significant volition; they develop meanings and have freedom to make choices	Bounded autonomy and free choice structurally limited, but the limits can be moved
5. Role of common sense	Clearly distinct from and less valid than science	Powerful everyday theories used by ordinary people	False beliefs that hide power and objective conditions
6. Theory looks like	a logical deductive system of interconnected definitions, axioms, and laws	A description of how a group’s meaning system is generated and sustained	A critique that reveals true conditions and helps people take action
7. An explanation that is true	logically connected to laws and based on facts	Resonates or feels right to those who are being studied	Supplies people with tools needed to change the world
8. Good Evidence	Based on precise observations that others can repeat	Embedded in context of fluid social interactions.	Informed by a theory that penetrates the surface level
9. Relevance of Knowledge	An instrumental orientation is used; knowledge enables people to master and control events	A practical orien- tation is used; knowledge helps us embrace/share empathetically others’ life worlds and experiences.	A dialecttiical orientation is used; knowledge lets people see and alter deeper structures.
10. Place for Science	Science is value free, and values have no place except when choosing a topic	Values are an integral part of social life: no group’s values are wrong, only different	All science must begin with a value position; some positions are right, some are wrong

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6. Kuhn, Thomas (1970). The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.