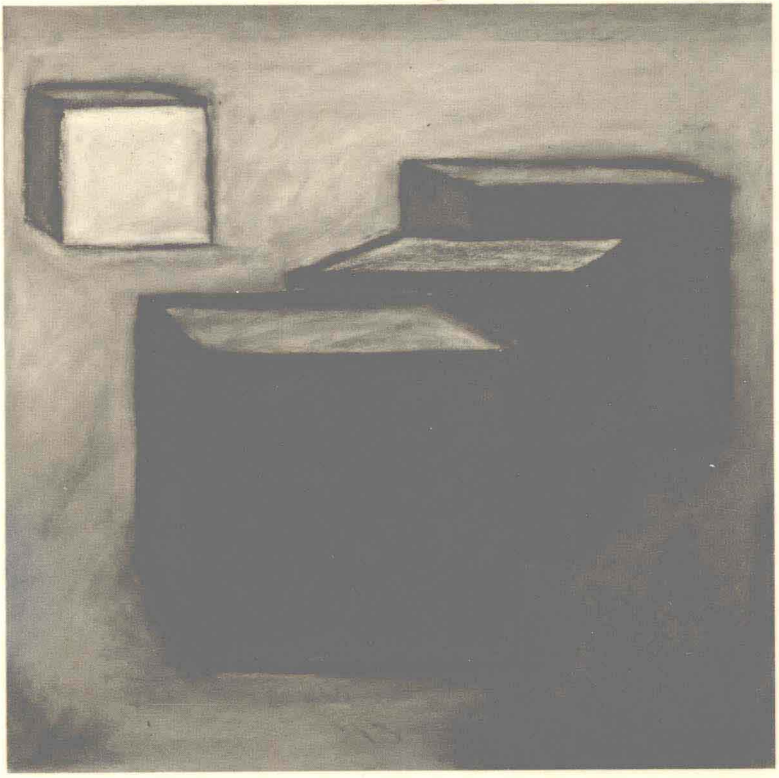
SOCIAL PROBLEMS



RONALD W. MARIS

SOCIAL PROBLEMS

Ronald W. Maris
University of South Carolina

Wadsworth Publishing Company
Belmont, California
A Division of Wadsworth, Inc.

Acquisitions editor: *Paul E. O'Connell*
Project editor: *Gladys True*
Production manager: *Stephen K. Emry*
Designer: *Stuart Paterson*
Artist: *Alice B. Thiede*
Part opener photo: *Joe Viesti*
Compositor: *Graphic World Inc.*
Typeface: *10/12 Century Old Style*
Printer: *R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company*

ISBN 0-534-10699-4 (previously ISBN 0-256-03178-9)
Library of Congress Catalog Card No. 87–72742

Printed in the United States of America

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 DO 5 4 3 2 1 0 9

PREFACE

Many students enrolling in a social problems course are at least vaguely interested in social change. How can our society be more fair? Does social inequality need to be reduced? Is it possible to make our world a little bit better place to live in? These are some of the central questions underlying a book like the one before you. Hopefully, many of you also either are or will become fascinated by social behavior and social structure. While our individual actions may make sense to us, social interaction can result in some curious collective problems. I think of the obvious irony of individuals paying into a federal social security system that may not even be there when they reach retirement age and need to draw from it.

This textbook makes a great deal of fuss about theory. It is even somewhat unique in this regard. We believe that one key to confronting America's social problems is to have a citizenry that can think critically about social issues and use its sociological imagination. Our theoretical approach here is unabashedly comprehensive. All of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology (namely, conflict theory, functionalism and neofunctionalism, structuralism, symbolic interactionism, deviance theory, exchange theory, and sociobiology) have something important to tell us about social problems. It is still premature to claim that one theory is better than another or that sociological theories can be integrated into a more general theory of social problems. In fact, in the interest of theoretical comprehensiveness for the first time we will apply exchange theory and recent structural sociology to the study of social problems.

Accordingly, our approach to social problems is different in that we start by "thinking small" (especially in Chapters 4 through 9). Thus, we can consider the social behaviors and problems of real-life individuals interacting in relatively small face-to-face groups. We believe that the values, rewards, meanings, structures, and so on of small groups of socially interacting individuals are highly relevant to the creation and resolution of most social problems. The biology and social psychology of social problems needs to be considered as well. Of course, thinking small has its limits (as our macrosociology colleagues will quickly remind us)! Thus, from the very beginning of our book we complement subinstitutional or small-group theories with institutional-level theories (particularly in Chapters 10 through 15). No understanding of social problems is complete without both theoretical approaches.

The above is not meant to slight the importance of research and data in the study of social problems. Actually this book is probably somewhat more in the objective condition tradition than the subjective interpretation tradition. With French sociologist Émile Durkheim we emphasize "social facts." Social prob-

lems are not just whimsical social constructions. There is a social world out there to be described, measured, counted, probed, and provoked. In the vein of George Homans's exchange theory and B. F. Skinner's behaviorism we have an abiding interest in actual human behaviors (as opposed to attitudes). Some of the important social facts that need to be attended to concern what we call nonproblematic society. For example, to understand sickness requires examining health; that is, social problems need to be contrasted with the ordinary routine workings of society that are usually not considered problematic.

Although I shall strive to be objective, comprehensive, and fair, my values obviously still affect the choice of problem topics and their treatment. Thus, these values need to be brought out in the open. First, I am a generalist. For example, I believe that the study of social problems should not be reduced to one theoretical perspective. I also believe that social problems need not have *only* social explanations. Therefore, if biology, history, economics, the arts, psychology, and so on will help our understanding, then (within limits) they will be incorporated. Second, I am a little right of center and conservative. Social behaviors must be understood before we try to change them. Although some social problems clearly require resolutions, others may not be as problematic as they seem at first blush. Certainly some social problems are highly resistant to permanent resolution. Third, microsociology will be taken as far as possible. Social institutions ultimately must have a payoff to some real individuals or they will eventually wither and perhaps even die. Conversely, apparently problematic social behaviors that do persist (e.g., prostitution or alcoholic use) are to some degree socially useful. Fourth, I champion quantitative sociology, research, and data. Although social "facts" can be erroneous, subjective, indicative of power or social inequality, and so on, some facts must be taken into account. One should be empirical, careful, and thorough in the investigation of social problems.

A word about the selection of particular social problems in this book is in order. Some social problems simply cannot be ignored. They appear in all social problems textbooks and almost demand our attention. These problems include—at least—ageism, sexism, racism, mental and physical disorders, drug and alcohol abuse, social inequality, and crime and violence. Other social problems, which are newer and more discretionary, shall be examined here. They include terrorism, nuclear war, the environment, family violence, social stress, the political economy, and the new American family.

These substantive topics are organized into an expanded introduction (Part I) consisting of three chapters on the sociology of social problems, theoretical perspectives, and empirical methods and data; a second part (II) (Chapters 4 through 9) on subinstitutionally related social problems; and finally (Part III) a six-chapter set of institutional or macrosocial problems. Each chapter begins with an overview of a social problem from the major theoretical perspectives. Next there is a "vivid case" or example of the chapter's specific social problem(s) in a panel. The introduction to each chapter consists of a topical lead-

in, listing of salient issues, key definitions, prevalence of the problem, and a brief natural history. Each social problem section is subdivided into three parts: stating the problem, analyzing the problem (from some or all of the seven theoretical perspectives), and resolving the problem. Finally, each chapter concludes with a summary, notes for elaboration of chapter points, a glossary of terms, and six annotated further readings. At the end of the book the student will find an extensive bibliography, as well as name and subject indexes.

This is a student-centered textbook. We have tried hard to make it readable and relevant to college students. There are an abundance of examples to help make abstract ideas clearer. Instead of being dull and dry, the topics are presented with humor and cartoons, where appropriate. There are panels of brief research reports, current news releases, competing viewpoints, pertinent historical data, and so on. Numerous figures, tables, pictures, and graphs appear throughout the book. Of course, I trust the book reflects the twenty-five years I have been teaching social problems courses to undergraduates and my deep interest in and respect for college students.

There is also an accompanying manual to assist both students and instructors. This manual contains test items (multiple-choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank, short and extended essay questions—all with a key to correct answers for self-paced study), discussion questions and class exercises, suggested class activities, lecture ideas, chapter outlines, relevant film lists, and of course, the glossaries and bibliography referred to earlier (in the text itself).

This book has been five years in writing and production. Many key people have sustained and assisted me during these years. First and foremost have been my wife, Beth, and Dorsey Press's Consulting Editor, Charles M. Bonjean. Both in their own ways have believed in me when I needed it and yet helped me get the best out of myself. Dorsey's Senior Editor Paul E. O'Connell has been a man of his word. He has been fair, critical when need be, and has always insisted on uncomprising standards of excellence. I am indebted to several anonymous reviewers of this book; they should be able to see the fruit of their criticisms in this final product. While I honestly did not always welcome their unflinching candor, having survived it the book and I are better for it. I also wish to thank the following nonanonymous reviewers: Scott J. South (University of New York at Albany), Anthony Orum (University of Illinois, Chicago), and James D. Orcutt (Florida State University). Since I did not always take their advice, they are not responsible for this final product. Of course, my students and colleagues at the University of South Carolina have been pestered over the years for data and ideas. My longtime friend Eui-Hang (Ken) Shin has been especially patient and dependable. John V. Skvoretz, Bruce H. Mayhew, Lynn Smith-Lovin, James A. McRae, Patrick D. Nolan, Jimy M. Sanders, Charles W. Tucker, Beth W. Ghiloni, Miriam Lee, Nancy Vigander-Winfrey, Clare Morris, and Darla Ladkau assisted in various capacities in the manuscript preparation.

Please, tell us what you like and dislike about the book. Future generations of students will benefit from your advice. This has been a long and sometimes

exhausting project. I would like to think I have earned a few parting hortatory thoughts. It saddens me to see that so much social inequity and injustice remains in America. Yet there is a great resiliency in both societies and individuals. There will always be social risks and problems; nothing is free. A major social and personal goal is to live well, not just live long. Perhaps in the last analysis the best that societies and individuals can hope for is to use themselves and their resources wisely—and to have the social opportunity to do just that.

Ronald W. Maris

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES