

Classic and Contemporary Readings in Sociology

Max Weber

Karl Marx

Erving Goffman

Liz Stanley

Auguste Comte

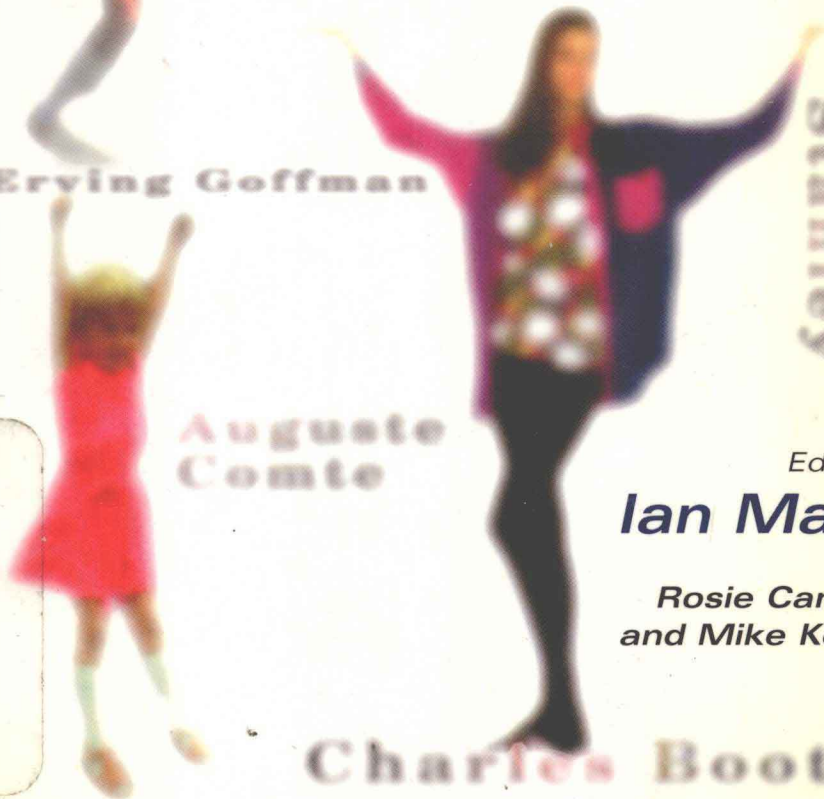
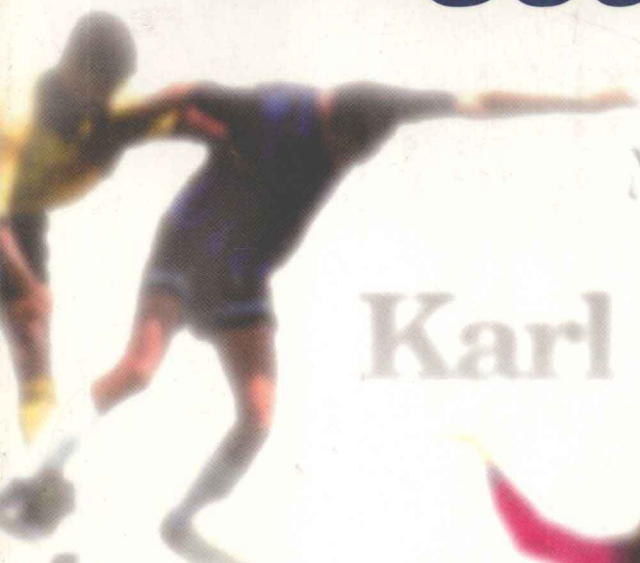
Edited by

Ian Marsh

with

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and Mike Keating**

Charles Booth



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Classic and Contemporary Readings in Sociology

Preface

Aims

The intention behind this book is to provide students with the opportunity to examine sociological theories, ideas and arguments in more depth than is possible through the summaries provided in introductory textbooks. It will enable students to read more substantial extracts from first hand sources – both classic sociological theorising and more recent sociological work.

The editors of any compilation of readings are faced by the dilemma of what to include and, more awkwardly, what to omit. And there is a particular danger that an introductory reader in sociology might try to cover too much, be too eclectic and not 'work'. In attempting to avoid this, we have aimed for a coherent thread to run through the reader – a clear focus on sociological theory and research, both classic and contemporary. The book is divided into four main sections. Part One, Origins and Concepts, looks at the history of the discipline of sociology and at some of the key themes that have influenced sociological theorising and investigation: in particular, social control, culture and socialisation. Parts Two and Four, Sociological Theories and Sociological Research, include a number of readings from founding theorists and investigators, including Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Charles Booth, and readings that illustrate more recent theoretical writing and research approaches. The focus on theory and research is extended by a selection of readings centred around the theme of Differences and Inequalities (Part Three); these readings provide students with substantive examples of work from an area where sociological theorising and research has been widely and fruitfully applied.

Sociological theory and research is a major part of all undergraduate sociology courses; as well as being the basis of the core/compulsory courses that feature on many Sociology degree programmes. However, it is often difficult to get students to read from original sources in this area and we feel that this collection illustrates the clarity and accessibility of some of the best

examples of past and present sociological work and will help to overcome any such reluctance. While the majority of sources from which the readings have been taken are well-known sociological sources, we have included a number that would perhaps not be thought of as obviously sociological. We make no apologies for this: we feel it is important for students to be aware that valuable sociological insights can be gained from a range of sources. Indeed, it is often the more unusual, non-mainstream sources that particularly grab our attention; and, of course, many classic theorists and writers who are now seen as key figures in Sociology did not necessarily see themselves as sociologists, or at least as solely sociologists. There are also a number of readings from feminist writers who may not see themselves as sociologists. Again, we see this as a strength of this collection, given the extensive critique of conventional sociological theory provided by feminist writers and the importance of feminist explanations for the divisions between men and women in society. As well as a balance between classic sociological work and contemporary pieces, the selection has an international flavour with readings from British, American and European sources.

The basic aim, then, is to encourage students in a deeper reading and understanding of original sociological work and it is hoped that these extracts will encourage students to locate and delve into the books from which they are taken.

Readership

The reader can be used as a text for a variety of courses on sociological theory, research methods and inequality. It is especially suited for courses on sociological theory and research provided for second- and third-year undergraduates – core and/or compulsory courses on sociological analysis, for instance. Equally, it could be used in conjunction with a more general introductory textbook by students following first-year undergraduate courses in Sociology.

Features

We have tried to provide some consistency of structure across the four parts with certain features included in each.

Each part starts with an **introduction** providing an overview of the area being looked at and setting the context for each of the individual readings – including how it relates to the other extracts and to the development of sociology in that particular area. These introductions explore the general areas being examined, explain why particular readings have been chosen and set those readings in context.

Each of the readings is preceded by a short **summary** highlighting some of the points and issues that students might consider when reading it. These summaries also remind readers of why the sources have been used and why the particular extracts have been chosen from them.

The **readings** themselves vary in length although we have tried to ensure that each is substantial enough to enable students to get a real flavour of the arguments being advanced without being so long as to necessitate cutting down on the range of sociological writing included. Obviously each source has had to be edited considerably and such editing is inevitably likely to have an effect on the character of that particular text. While we have tried to avoid distorting the meaning and sense of the work we have included, it is inevitable that some of the depth and subtlety of the work of the writers included in this collection will be lost in the editing. Having made that disclaimer, the basic aim of the reader is to introduce students to original sociological sources.

In trying to remain faithful to the spirit of the readings we have had to face the question of sexist language. The majority of the writers whose work we have included have routinely used male terms – man, he, him, his – when referring to the person or people in general. However, as the intention is for students to read original sources we did not feel it appropriate to alter the text to ‘correct’ such language. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the extracts it is important that students are aware of the social and historical context from which they were written – a context that included explicit sexism, reflected in gender-blindness in language.

(Note: Where readings have been edited we have used the convention of [...] to indicate an omission from the source. Any words or phrases that have been added have been put in square brackets.)

We feel that the writers included in the book will provide students with a flavour of ‘real’ sociology and thereby stimulate reflection on the nature of sociology. To encourage this, after each reading there are **questions** that encourage students to reflect on the extract and the issues raised by it. These are not intended to be essay questions, rather questions which can be used for group discussion and/or individual consideration.

At the end of each section there is a more general student **activity** that can be used for students to address some of the issues raised by the readings and look for patterns and connections between them. They could (and hopefully will) be adapted according to the structure of the particular course the student is following: they might be undertaken individually or as a group activity and could form the basis of fuller classroom or seminar discussion.

As well as reading more from the sources of the extracts themselves, other suggestions for **further reading** are provided at the end of each section.

References and notes. We have edited these down to a minimum to avoid too many interruptions to the readings. However, we have had to keep many references – when, for instance, a work is either directly referred to or quoted from in a particular reading. To ensure consistency, all the sources referred to in the readings are listed, reading by reading, at the end of the book (pages 360–70).

Ian Marsh
Liverpool Hope University College
April 1998

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Part I

Origins and Concepts

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Introduction

Sociology as a separate area of study is a relatively new discipline and there has been a tendency to see it as a less essential subject than more traditional disciplines. This view is perhaps due to the fact that relatively few people will have encountered sociology at school. However, the areas and issues that it investigates – including, for example, the relationship of the family unit to wider society, the causes of deviant behaviour, the role of religion – have long been a source of intellectual examination and debate and to that extent we would argue that sociology has a rich and diverse history. The readings in this section illustrate how contemporary sociology has been influenced and shaped from a number of directions.

The Social Sciences in general, and sociology as a distinct academic discipline, developed in response to the massive technical, economic and social changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: changes that transformed the social order of the Western world. Scientific and technological developments encouraged the hope that scientific methods would be able to explain the social as well as natural worlds. The Industrial Revolution that began in Britain in the late eighteenth century led to the growth of mechanised industry and a population migration to urban areas to work in the new factories. All of the major ‘classic’ sociological writers reflected on and offered analyses of these drastic changes and of the transformation from ‘simple’ societies to complex, industrial ones.

In his analysis of the origins of sociology, Robert Nisbet (1970) suggests that it was in the years 1830 to 1900 that the conceptual framework of modern sociology was created. He argues that ‘the fundamental ideas of European sociology are best understood as responses to the problem of order created at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the collapse of the old regime under the blows of industrialism and revolutionary democracy’. The Industrial Revolution and the democratic revolutions in France and America were the key events in the history of sociological thought. Indeed, it would be hard to find any area of thought and writing in the nineteenth century

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that was not affected by one or both of these events. As Nisbet puts it: 'The cataclysmic nature of each is plain enough if we look at the responses of those who lived through the revolutions and their immediate consequences.' Today we tend to see particular historical events, including revolutions, as part of the long-term process of change; we tend to emphasise evolution rather than revolution. Nisbet points out that to intellectuals of that age, radical and conservative alike, the changes were of almost millennial abruptness. 'Contrast between present and past seemed stark – terrifying and intoxicating, depending upon one's relation to the old order and to the forces at work on it.' Reading 2 is taken from Nisbet's analysis of 'The Two Revolutions' and their influence on the development of sociology.

Nisbet's argument that sociology developed in response to the 'problem of order' of the newly industrialised Western world suggests that social control is at the heart of society and sociology. This is the focus of the second reading, taken from Peter Berger's introduction to sociology, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective*, in which Berger provides a personal argument for studying sociology. Although only brief, and freely written, this introductory book had a tremendous impact on the expansion of sociology in the 1960s and 1970s. Along with C. Wright Mill's *The Sociological Imagination*, Berger's book captured the excitement and challenge of studying society and inspired a generation of students and teachers. As he says at the end of the first chapter, 'Sociology is more like a passion. The sociological perspective is more like a demon that possesses one, that drives one compellingly, again and again, to the questions that are its own. An introduction to sociology is, therefore, an invitation to a very special kind of passion.' This excitement is well illustrated in the extract here (Reading 3) in which Berger introduces the key sociological concept of social control. He describes various systems of social control, including physical violence, economic pressure, ridicule, gossip, morality, custom and manners, and examines how they can influence our day-to-day lives.

In their attempts to understand how societies 'worked' – how they developed and held together – many of the early, 'classic' sociologists studied pre-modern societies; perhaps in the hope that finding out how 'simpler' societies were structured and organised would help an understanding of modern, industrial societies. Durkheim's study of Australian aborigines (from written reports, not his own fieldwork) helped him develop his views on social solidarity and the collective conscience. Marx, Weber, Tonnies and Spencer, among others, all referred to earlier forms of society in their analyses of social development.

This tradition was continued in the pioneering work of social anthropologists such as Margaret Mead and Bronislaw Malinowski (both of whom carried out fieldwork in the Pacific in the first half of this century), Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (whose work included studies of the Andaman Islanders, 1922, Australian tribes, 1931, and African kinship systems, 1950) and Edward Evans-Pritchard (who carried out extensive fieldwork in Africa in the 1930s