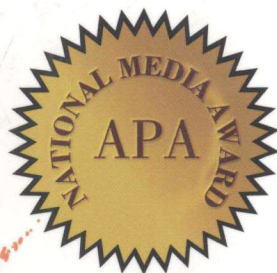
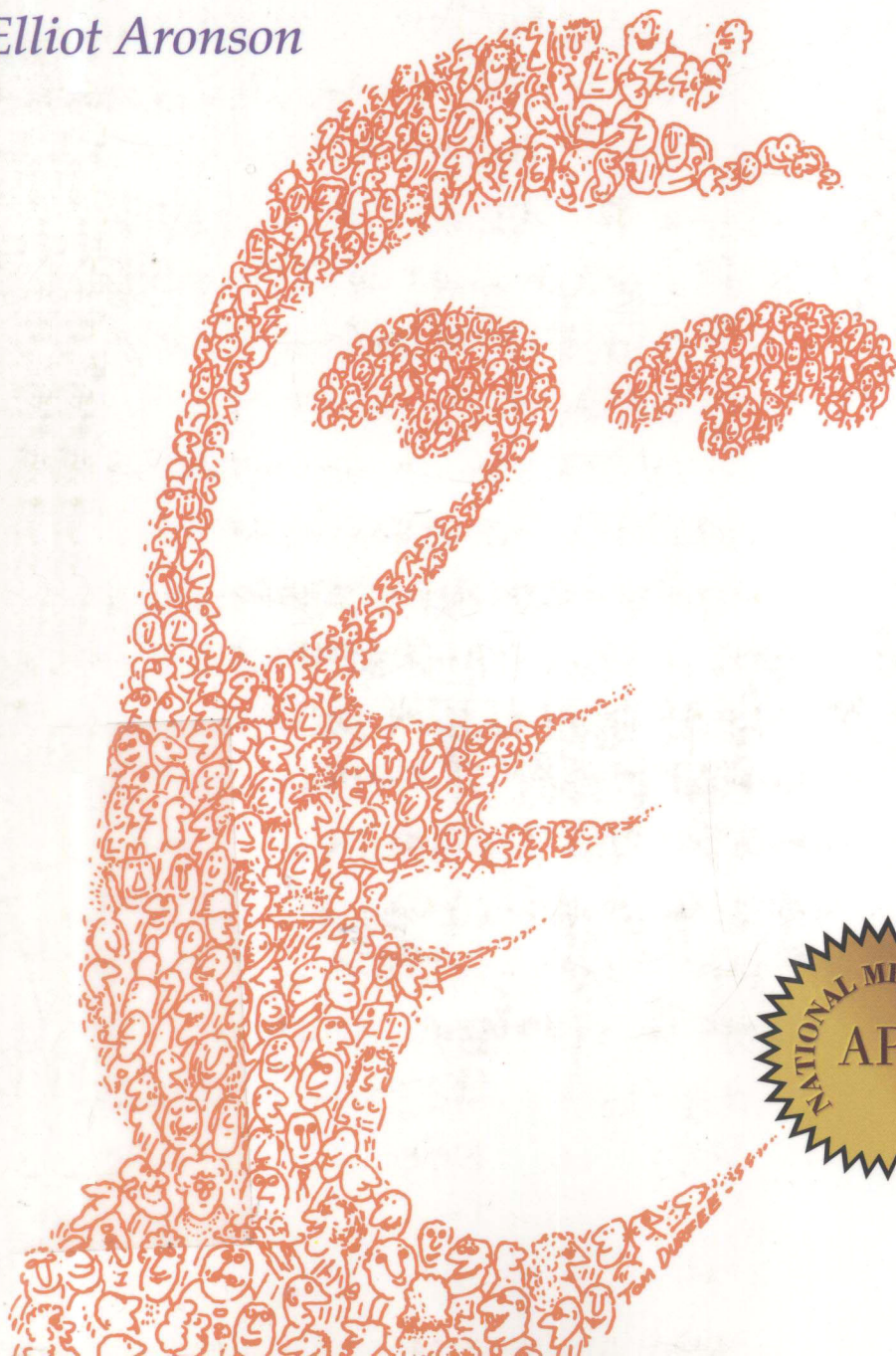


"STILL THE BEST...A MASTERPIECE!" - *Contemporary Psychology*

*Eleventh Edition*

# *The Social Animal*

Elliot Aronson



*Eleventh Edition*

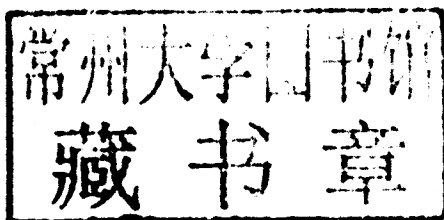
# *The Social Animal*

*Elliot Aronson*

University of California, Santa Cruz

*with Joshua Aronson*

New York University



WORTH PUBLISHERS

*To Vera, of course*

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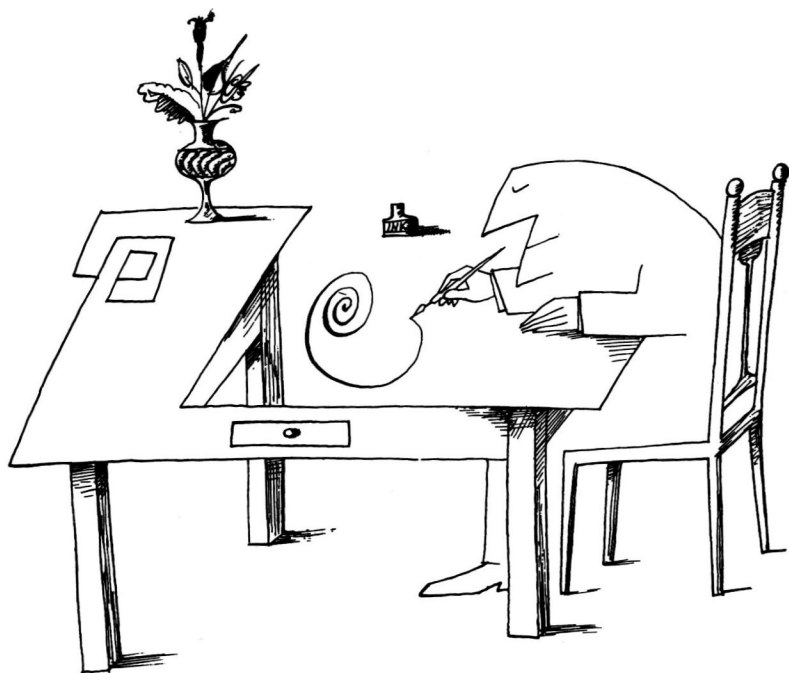
# *The Social Animal*

### ***Books by Elliot Aronson***

- Handbook of Social Psychology* (with G. Lindzey), 2nd ed., 1968–1969
- Theories of Cognitive Consistency* (with R. Abelson et al.), 1968
- Voices of Modern Psychology*, 1969
- The Social Animal*, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2008, 2011
- Readings About The Social Animal*, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2003, 2008
- Social Psychology* (with R. Helmreich), 1973
- Research Methods in Social Psychology* (with M. Carlsmith & Ellsworth), 1976
- The Jigsaw Classroom*, 1978
- Burnout: From Tedium to Personal Growth* (with A. Pines & D. Kafry), 1981
- Energy Use: The Human Dimension* (with P. C. Stern), 1984
- The Handbook of Social Psychology* (with G. Lindzey), 3rd ed., 1985
- Career Burnout* (with A. Pines), 1988
- Methods of Research in Social Psychology* (with Ellsworth, M. Carlsmith, & Gonzales), 1990
- Age of Propaganda* (with A. R. Pratkanis), 1992, 2000
- Social Psychology: Volumes 1, 2, & 3* (with A. R. Pratkanis), 1992
- Social Psychology: The Heart and the Mind* (with T. Wilson & R. Akert), 1994
- Nobody Left to Hate: Teaching Compassion After Columbine*, 2000
- Social Psychology: An Introduction* (with T. Wilson & R. Akert), 2002, 2005, 2007
- The Adventures of Ruthie and a Little Boy Named Grandpa* (with Ruth Aronson), 2006
- Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)* (with Carol Tavis), 2007
- Not By Chance Alone: My Life as a Social Psychologist*, 2010

### ***Books by Joshua Aronson***

- Improving Academic Achievement*, 2002
- Scientist and Humanist* (with M.H. Gonzales and C. Tavis), 2010



Saul Steinberg, *Untitled drawing*, ink on paper.  
Originally published in *The New Yorker*, May 29, 1965.  
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# *Why I Wrote This Book*

In 1970–1971, I was invited to spend the year in Stanford, California, at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. During that year, I was given all the support, encouragement, and freedom to do whatever I wanted, and I was assured that I was not responsible to anyone for anything. There, on a beautiful hill, roughly 30 miles from San Francisco (my favorite city), with a whole year in which to do anything my heart desired, I chose to write this book. Surrounded as I was by the beauty of the countryside, and close as I was to the excitement of San Francisco, why did I lock myself in a cubicle and write a book? It's not that I'm crazy and it's not that I needed the money. If there's a single reason why I wrote this book, it's that I once heard myself tell a large class of sophomores that social psychology is a young science—and it made me feel like a coward.

Let me explain: We social psychologists are fond of saying that social psychology is a young science—and it is a young science. Of course, astute observers have been making interesting pronouncements and proposing exciting hypotheses about social phenomena at least since the time of Aristotle, but these pronouncements and hypotheses were not seriously tested until well into the 20th century. The first systematic social psychological experiment (to my knowledge) was conducted by Triplett in 1898 (he measured the effect of competition on performance), but it was not until the late 1930s that experimental social psychology really took off, primarily under the inspiration of Kurt Lewin and his talented students. By the same token it is interesting to

note that, although Aristotle first asserted some of the basic principles of social influence and persuasion around 350 BC, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that those principles were put to the experimental test by Carl Hovland and his associates.

In another sense, however, to claim that social psychology is a young science is to be guilty of a gigantic cop-out: It's a way of pleading with people not to expect too much from us. Specifically, it can be our way of dodging the responsibility for, and avoiding the risks inherent in, applying our findings to the problems of the world we live in. In this sense, protesting that social psychology is a young science is akin to claiming that we are not yet ready to say anything important, useful, or (if the reader will forgive me for using an overused word) relevant.

The purpose of this volume is unashamedly (but with some trepidation) to spell out the relevance that sociopsychological research might have for some of the problems besetting contemporary society. Most of the data discussed in this volume are based on experiments; most of the illustrations and examples, however, are derived from current social problems—including prejudice, propaganda, war, alienation, aggression, unrest, and political upheaval. This duality reflects two of my own biases—biases that I cherish. The first is that the experimental method is the best way to understand a complex phenomenon. It is a truism of science that the only way to really know the world is to reconstruct it: That is, in order to truly understand what causes what, we must do more than simply observe—rather, we must be responsible for producing the first “what” so that we can be sure that it really caused the second “what.” My second bias is that the only way to be certain that the causal relations uncovered in experiments are valid is to bring them out of the laboratory and into the real world. Thus, as a scientist, I like to work in a laboratory; as a citizen, however, I like to have windows through which I can look out upon the world. Windows, of course, work in both directions: We often derive hypotheses from everyday life. We can best test these hypotheses under the sterile conditions of the laboratory; and in order to try to keep our ideas from becoming sterile, we attempt to take our laboratory findings back out through the window to see if they hold up in the real world.

Implicit in all this is my belief that social psychology is extremely important—that social psychologists can play a vital role in making the world a better place. Indeed, in my more grandiose moments, I



nurse the secret belief that social psychologists are in a unique position to have a profound and beneficial impact on our lives by providing an increased understanding of such important phenomena as conformity, persuasion, prejudice, love, and aggression. Now that my secret belief is no longer a secret, I can promise only to try not to force it down the readers' throats on the following pages. Rather, I'll leave it to the readers to decide, after they have finished this volume, whether social psychologists have discovered or can ever discover anything useful—much less anything uniquely important.

Compared with other texts in social psychology, this is a slim volume—and purposely so. It is meant to be a brief introduction to the world of social psychology, not an encyclopedic catalogue of research and theory. Because I opted to make it brief, I had to be selective. This means both that there are some traditional topics I chose not to cover and that I have not gone into exhaustive detail with those topics I did choose to cover. Because of my desire to keep the book compact and accessible, it was a difficult book to write. I have had to be more a “news analyst” than a “reporter.” For example, there are many controversies that I did not fully describe. Rather, I exercised my own judgment; made an educated (and, I hope, honest) assessment of what is currently the most accurate description of the field, and stated it as clearly as I could.

This decision was made with the student in mind—this book was written for students, not for my colleagues. If I have learned one thing in a half century of college teaching, it is that, although a detailed presentation of all positions is useful (and sometimes even fascinating) to one's colleagues, it tends to leave students cold. Students, in effect, ask us what time it is, and we, in effect, present them with a chart showing the various time zones around the world, a history of time-telling from the sundial to the latest computerized creation, and a detailed description of the anatomy of the grandfather clock. By the time we've finished, they've lost interest in the question. Nothing is safer than to state all sides of all issues, but few things are more boring. Although I have discussed controversial issues, I have not hesitated to draw conclusions. In short, I have attempted to be brief without being unfair, and I have tried to present complex material simply and clearly without oversimplifying. Only the reader can determine how successful I have been in accomplishing either of these goals.

When I finished writing the first edition of this book in 1972, I thought I was done with it. How naive. Early in 1975, I decided, with

some reluctance, to revise this book for the first time. A lot had happened in three years. Not only had new and exciting things been discovered in the field of social psychology, but, even more important, the world had taken a few major turns since the winter of 1972, when I put the final scrawl on my yellow pad for the first edition. To name just a few of the major events: A brutal, draining, and divisive war came to an end; a vice-president and a president of the United States were forced to resign in humiliation; and the women's liberation movement was beginning to have a significant impact on the consciousness of the nation. These were sociopsychological events of the greatest significance. The indolent slob who lives inside me was forced to acknowledge (with a long sigh) that any book that purports to be about our lives—yours and mine—must strive to stay abreast of the times.

Needless to say, it didn't end with one revision. As it turned out, the steady march of events has forced me to revise the book every three or four years. Again, not only do societal events change rapidly, but, social psychology, being a vibrant science, continues to produce interesting new concepts and findings. To fail to keep in touch with this research would be a disservice to the serious student. But here, an author must be careful. In our zeal to be thoroughly modern, there is a tendency for textbook writers to neglect perfectly respectable research just because it happens to be more than 10 years old.

Here's how it happens: We writers want to retain the classics and we want to add the research that has come out since the last edition. But we don't want the book to get much fatter. Something has to go; and so, in most textbooks, a lot of good research gets swept into oblivion, not because it has been replaced by something better—only by something newer. This creates the illusion that the field lacks continuity; that is, there's the classic research and the modern research with very little in between. This is terribly misleading.

Over the past four decades, I have tried to deal with this problem by steadfastly refusing to replace a fine "middle-aged" study by a newer one unless the newer one added something important to our understanding of the phenomenon being discussed. In the 11th edition, I have discussed several new studies—studies that were performed during the past five years. But I hasten to add that, by and large, these studies really are *new*—not simply recent. My hope is that the revisions of *The Social Animal* retain the compact grace of the original and remain up to date without eliminating or short-changing the fine research of the recent past.

# Acknowledgments

I am indicated on the title page as the sole author of this book, and it is certainly true that I wrote down all the words and did most of the thinking that produced them. Accordingly, if there are any stupidities in this book, they are mine, and if anything you read on these pages makes you angry, I'm the person you should yell at. At the same time, I want to confess that I never do anything entirely by myself. Many people contributed their knowledge and ideas to my word factory, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their generous help.

For the first edition of this book, Vera Aronson (my wife) and Ellen Berscheid (one of my most distinguished former students) were particularly helpful. They painstakingly went over the original manuscript, page by page and line by line, making numerous suggestions and criticisms that had a significant impact on the final form of this book. Moreover, their enthusiasm for the project was infectious and helped me to climb out of frequent bouts of "writer's despair."

Several other people contributed valuable ideas and suggestions. I cannot possibly cite them all, but the most significant contributors were Nancy Aston, Leonard Berkowitz, David Bradford, John Darley, Richard Easterlin, Jonathan Freedman, James Freel, Robert Helmreich, Judy Hilton, Michael Kahn, John Kaplan, Judson Mills, and Jev Sikes.

Most of this book was written while I was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, California, and I am deeply grateful to the staff of that fine institution for providing me with the necessary leisure and facilities.

Finally, I am pleased to report that my friend and mentor, Leon Festinger, did not have anything to do with this manuscript—directly. He never read it, and, to my knowledge, he was not even

aware that I was writing it. He is, however, responsible for its existence. Leon was a wonderful teacher and a demanding role model. I could say that he taught me all I know about social psychology, but that would be a gross understatement. He taught me something much more valuable than that: He taught me how to find out the things that neither I nor anybody else knew.

March 1972

This book is now in its eleventh edition. One might say that I have grown old revising it. It is a bittersweet feeling to be able to trace the passage of time by watching the face on the back cover of this book (*my face!*) become increasingly wrinkled and gray-bearded. When I first wrote the book, I was moved to acknowledge my indebtedness to my friend and mentor, Leon Festinger. It goes without saying that I still feel gratitude and affection for that good and great man. If anything, these feelings intensified over the years. I loved being his student—and I guess I will never stop being his student. In 1989, Leon died, marking the end of an important era in social psychology. He is sorely missed—not only by those of us who knew and loved him, but also by anyone who has been influenced by his research and theories; this would include just about anyone who has ever been a student of social psychology.

In addition, as this book and I have grown older, I have become increasingly aware of my indebtedness to my own students. Every four years, as I begin revising the book, I am struck by the realization that these are not simply my own ideas—rather, they are ideas I have developed in collaboration with my students. Over the past five decades, I have been blessed with a great many outstanding students, from my very first research assistants in 1960 (Merrill Carlsmith, Tony Greenwald, and John M. Darley) to my most recent students at The University of California, Santa Cruz. They have all taught me a great deal, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge my debt to all of them. I have also enjoyed talking with and stealing ideas from some remarkably gifted colleagues. Two of them in particular, Anthony Pratkanis and Carol Tavis, have contributed a great deal to the continued improvement and updating of this book. It is a pleasure to acknowledge their generosity.

There is a sense in which this book is a family enterprise. This has been especially true during the past two decades when I have ex-

perienced the singular gratification of being deeply influenced by my grown children—each in his/her own fashion. First among equals is my youngest son, Joshua Aronson (a brilliant experimental social psychologist in his own right), who takes great delight in trying to keep me on my toes regarding recent methodological and theoretical innovations. More specifically, he has provided me with invaluable insights and suggestions about changes to be made in the ninth, tenth, and the eleventh editions of this book and has done much of the writing and integrating of the new material. My eldest son, Hal Aronson (an environmental sociologist), helps to keep my focus broader than the confines of the laboratory. And my middle children, Neal Aronson (a firefighter for the city of Santa Cruz) and Julie Aronson (an educational researcher and evaluator), toil in the trenches of human service on a day-to-day basis, reminding me by their example that, ultimately, social psychology must strive to be useful to people in their daily lives. In addition, Patricia Voda, Joshua's ace research assistant, provided many helpful suggestions and indispensable bibliographic and research assistance.

Finally, as you may have noticed, the dedication of this book reads, "To Vera, of course." The Vera in question is Vera Aronson, who has been my best friend and favorite consultant for more than 55 years and who (to my great good fortune) also happens to be my wife. To anyone who knows us well, the phrase "of course" in the dedication is redundant. And, because redundancy is an occupational hazard in the teaching game, I must admit (with a blush) that it is almost certainly not the last redundancy you will need to put up with.

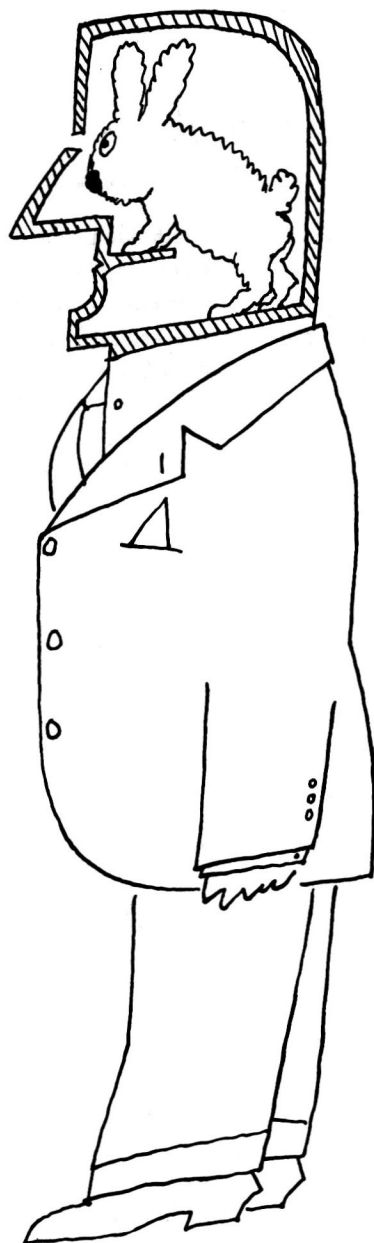
Elliot Aronson  
December, 2010

# *The Social Animal*

Man is by nature a social animal; an individual who is unsocial naturally and not accidentally is either beneath our notice or more than human. Society is something in nature that precedes the individual. Anyone who either cannot lead the common life or is so self-sufficient as not to need to, and therefore does not partake of society, is either a beast or a god.

Aristotle

*Politics*, c. 328 BC



Saul Steinberg, *Untitled drawing*, ink on paper.

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# 1

## *What Is Social Psychology?*

As far as we know, Aristotle was the first serious thinker to formulate some of the basic principles of social influence and persuasion. However, although he did say that man is a social animal, it is unlikely that he was the first person to make that observation. Moreover, chances are he was not the first person to marvel at the truth of that statement while simultaneously puzzling over its triteness and insubstantiality. Although it is certainly true that humans are social animals, so are a host of other creatures, from ants and bees to monkeys and apes. What does it mean to say that humans are “social animals”? Let’s look at some concrete examples:

A college student named Sam and four of his acquaintances are watching a presidential candidate make a speech on television. Sam is favorably impressed; he likes him better than the opposing candidate because of his sincerity. After the speech, one of the other students asserts that she was turned off by the candidate, that she considered him to be a complete phony, and that she prefers the opposing candidate. All of the others are quick to agree with her. Sam looks puzzled and a trifle distressed. Finally, he mumbles to his acquaintances, “I guess he didn’t come across as sincere as I would have hoped.”

A second-grade teacher stands before her class and asks, “What is the sum of six, nine, four, and eleven?” A girl in the third row puzzles over the question for several seconds, hesitates, raises