

# SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

A HUMANIST INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY



Rodney D. Elliott

Don H. Shambler

# SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

## A HUMANIST INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY

---

**RODNEY D. ELLIOTT**

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
Ohio University*

**DON H. SHAMBLIN**

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
Ohio University*

**PRENTICE HALL**

*Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632*



## Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Elliott, Rodney Duanne.

Society in transition: a humanist introduction to sociology/

Rodney D. Elliott, Don H. Shamblin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-13-816208-5

I. Sociology. I. Shamblin, Don H. II. Title.

HM51.E38 1992

301—dc20

91-27243

CIP

Production Editor: KERRY REARDON

Acquisitions Editor: NANCY ROBERTS

Copy Editor: HENRY PELS

Cover Designer: SUZANNE BEHNKE

Prepress Buyer: KELLY BEHR

Manufacturing Buyer: MARY ANN GLORIANDE



©1992 by Prentice-Hall, Inc.

A Simon & Schuster Company

Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey 07632

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-13-816208-5

Prentice-Hall International (UK) Limited, *London*

Prentice-Hall of Australia Pty. Limited, *Sydney*

Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., *Toronto*

Prentice-Hall Hispanoamericana, S.A., *Mexico*

Prentice-Hall of India Private Limited, *New Delhi*

Prentice-Hall of Japan, Inc., *Tokyo*

Simon & Schuster Asia Pte. Ltd., *Singapore*

Editora Prentice-Hall do Brasil, Ltda., *Rio de Janeiro*

## PREFACE

Why another textbook in introductory sociology? There are already dozens of books available, many of them excellent in their own way. But most texts, trying to appeal to a mass audience of beginning students and hundreds of professors who make book adoptions, are encyclopedic and eclectic. The best of them are large, beautifully produced, and quite expensive. But despite the cost, most courses cannot cover the entire book in a term. Instructors must pick and choose among the smorgasbord of sociology, presenting students with a survey of vaguely related topics.

Most introductory sociology textbooks have a common fault, in our judgment. They present sociology as a collection of weakly connected facts, information, statistics, and competing theories to be memorized by students in anticipation of an examination. There is often no coherence, no overriding view of society, and no real sense of the value and excitement of sociology. Students are encouraged to commit information to memory, but seldom encouraged to engage in reflection or critical thinking. *Society In Transition* challenges the reader to think about sociology and to think sociologically.

Our aim is to present an alternative book. It has several distinguishing features:

1. *Brevity With Depth.* Most of the key concepts of sociology are covered within twelve chapters, representing the consensual basic areas of sociology. By limiting the number of chapters, we are able to go into depth on the essentials of sociology and to avoid undue segmentalization of the field. Where time is available, instructors may wish to supplement the text with additional materials to illustrate the many ways that sociology can be applied to topics of current interest.

2. *A Humanistic Perspective.* Modern sociologists often try to gain credibility and legitimacy for their chosen field by presenting it as "value-free science." But insightful students know, as did the historic founders of sociology, that a discipline which deals with such topics as social inequality, race relations, human freedom, and political oppression cannot be detached from human values. To pretend otherwise is not only deceptive, it presents an anemic sociology shorn of its relevance to pressing social issues. Sociology must be as objective as possible in its methods, but at the same time, engaged with the moral and political issues which confront humankind in a rapidly changing world. And it must be honest. To this end, we have candidly acknowledged our own values and freely discussed some of the value implications of sociological knowledge. We do not expect every reader to agree with our priorities, but students and teachers are encouraged to consider their own values and the various ways that sociological knowledge might be used to make the world a freer, more secure, more fulfilling environment for human life. We hope this approach will encourage reflection and discussion inside and outside the classroom.

3. *An Historical Analysis With A Theme Of Social Change.* This book embraces an explicitly historical view of modern social reality in which economic and political forces propel us into the future. But it is not a deterministic view, for those social forces

of history are shaped by human consciousness and human actions. Too many books present a chapter on Social Change, while the remainder of the text is ahistorical. Such an oversight belittles the importance of the past *and* the future, while exaggerating the importance of contemporary perceptions of reality. Social change provides the integrating theme of this book, binding the chapters together into a coherent whole.

Sociology began as a disciplined effort to more clearly understand the changing social framework in which we live our lives so that we could more wisely make choices and take actions to improve the human condition—to liberate people, to lengthen and enrich their lives in nature, and to correct the harm we do to one another through our own unjust social arrangements. We want sociology to remain true to that original promise and we believe that an introductory textbook should explicitly pursue those objectives.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We are profoundly indebted to a large community of scholars whose labors and imagination provide the major ideas of this book. We cite only some of them in the text. It is important to note that scholars outside of academic sociology are part of that community, especially anthropologists, historians, and economists.

We thank Bernard N. Meltzer of Central Michigan University for his careful reading and critiquing of our early drafts of Chapters 1–5 and Sidney Elliott Wittenberg for giving us her interpretation of a student's response to Chapters 1–6. Many of our colleagues at Ohio University have been generous with their help. Aileen Hall, early in the project, provided sage advice on women's perspectives in sociology, and Bruce Ergood reviewed and critiqued Chapter 9. Several others have loaned books and materials, made helpful suggestions, and have generally been supportive and patient, even when they grew tired of hearing about this project. Several reviewers for Prentice Hall contributed to the development of the book at various stages, including John J. Macionis of Kenyon College, Steven Beach of Avila College, and Charles Norman of Indiana State University. Chet Ballard of Valdosta State College, Glenn Goodwin of Pitzer College, and Joseph Scimecca of George Mason University reviewed the entire manuscript and made detailed criticisms and many helpful suggestions. Most of all, they gave us the encouragement needed to complete the project. We would like to blame all of the aforementioned for any errors or inadequacies of the book, but in fairness we cannot. We can only thank them for their contributions.

We also owe a debt to the members of the Association for Humanist Sociology who have articulated most clearly the values and the agenda of a humanist sociology and whose organizational efforts convinced us of the need for a book of this kind. While that association and its official journal, *Humanity and Society*, are the most visible artifacts of a sociology dedicated to humanist values, we wrote this book for a much larger number of sociologists who are humanists at heart and in method and purpose of inquiry.

This project would never have been completed without the moral support of our families. Gaye Shamblin took time to read and respond to several chapters, always with enthusiasm, and helped with the typing. All of the members of both families, throughout the many months of procrastination, agonizing, and preoccupation, have been understanding and encouraging.

Finally we thank Neda Mitchell for typing major portions of the manuscript and our editors at Prentice Hall, Nancy Roberts, who was willing to take a chance on a somewhat unorthodox book, and Kerry Reardon, who helped turn the manuscript into an attractive and usable book.

## PERSONAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE AUTHORS

Sociologists' quest for scientific objectivity and the suspension of moral judgment have been useful stances from which to conduct and report research and to increase the reliability of our knowledge. But if we sociologists ignore our foundations in human values, we risk our credibility with the very people whose support is necessary for the social sciences to survive. For that reason, we consider it appropriate to report some autobiographical facts and impressions that may enable our readers to better understand our presentation. Such understanding may enhance your appreciation of the passion we bring to the study of sociology as well as the limits and biases of our vision.

### **RODNEY ELLIOTT**

---



I "came of age" during the depression years of the 1930s and the trauma of World War II in a partially rural, partially small-town community of Kansas. My experiences in family and school, in several part-time and temporary jobs, in two brief stints of military service, and in my college education led me to appreciate that my childhood and adolescence were privileged. My immediate family circumstances were marginal

middle class, especially during the economic austerity of the 1930s. But both my paternal and maternal grandparents owned and operated farms which assured community respect for themselves and their children, half of whom were able to secure college educations at a time when few went on to college. I was male, white, Protestant, and of Anglo-Saxon ancestry in a community where those categories and groups dominated political, economic, and cultural life. I soon learned from my kin and my middle-class teachers that I was expected to “do well” in school and I soon fulfilled their expectations as I fulfilled my own self-expectations. Two military enlistments resulted in two G.I. Bill higher educational entitlements that enabled me to complete undergraduate and graduate training and to enter the professorial ranks just as the post-war baby boomers began to enter college.

Mine has been a life of being in the right place at the right time. It satisfies my ego to note that I worked hard for my many rewards. But I have learned that my opportunities are not universally available to other humans and that I have been able to pass on my good fortune to my children who thrive and, in turn, pass on their good life to my grandchildren. Other humans not only suffer their own misfortune, but against all their efforts, pass on misfortune to their children and grandchildren.

I came to sociology by way of reading American literature. Sinclair Lewis’s novels, *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, and *Elmer Gantry*, and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* particularly sensitized me to the contrasts between the American dream of equal opportunity and the ugly reality of much injustice, hypocrisy, and deceit in American life. Herein is a message about sociology. Sociological insight and compassionate identification with abused humanity are not restricted to scientific and academic sociology, but are found widespread among the humanities—literature, drama, and art.

Sociology became for me a systematic way to understand the injustices of class inequality and racial oppression. I’ve lived, studied, and worked closely with good, caring people who have *not* been properly rewarded in pay and promotion for their creativity, dedication, hard work, and responsibility—not rewarded primarily because they were African-Americans, were women, lacked paper credentials (not competence), or simply because out of moral convictions, they refused to cooperate with higher-ups and corrupt practices of organizations. I am morally indignant at the injustices around me, but as a member of my community I share some responsibility for what exists.

Religious doctrines and such secular ideologies as capitalism and socialism embrace many of my own humanist values and offer important and critical insights into the roots of social injustice. But I have found ritual and faith to be poor guides for distinguishing between truth and falsehood and between goodness and cruelty. Sociology too is not infallible and has sometimes been applied to anti-humanist ends, but the main body of sociological thought and scholarship has helped me search for truth and human understanding. I commend sociology to you, the reader, for those same purposes.

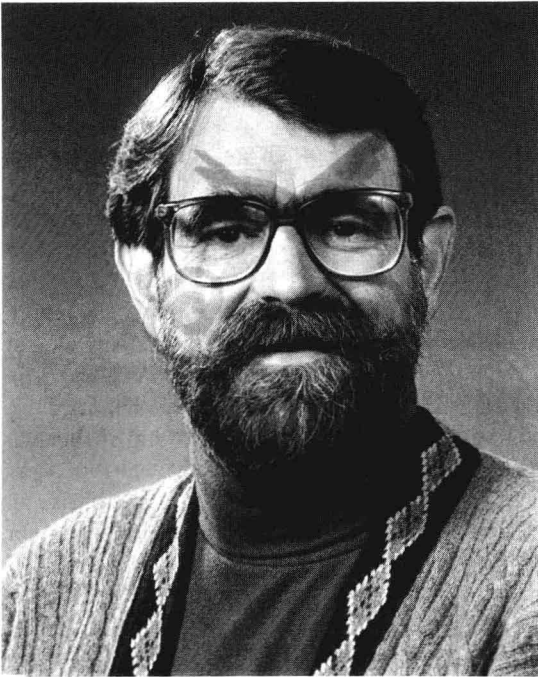
Finally, I have personal knowledge of five generations of my family who lived through America’s transition from a rural, agrarian, village and small-town based society to life in the city, working for large bureaucratic organizations. I have witnessed the many “blessings” of technological progress as well as some of the human costs,



especially the loss of a strong sense of community and human mutuality. Because sociology emerged in the context of trying to make sense of this general transition, its perspectives resonate profoundly with my own personal sense of time and place.

### **DON SHAMBLIN**

---



Curiosity about human social life and anger about injustice; these are the two personal qualities which originally drew me to sociology and which continue to sustain my commitment. I lived as a child in Oklahoma, that curious state that is an interesting mixture of the “old South” and the western frontier. Growing up, I somehow assimilated a good measure of the “Populist” spirit which is so strong in those parts, the manner of thinking that is distrustful of giant industrial and financial enterprises while extolling the value of the “common man.”

After my parents divorced, my mother strove mightily to maintain a middle-class lifestyle, although our situation was financially precarious. I was always struck by social inequalities that existed, even in the relatively egalitarian environment of small towns in which we lived. Why should some people enjoy so much more wealth, power, and social honor than others who were equally deserving? At the extreme, there was a “colored town” on one side of the railroad tracks, where black people lived in total

segregation, in poor housing, without paved roads, and, for the most part, in or near poverty. Schools were segregated until I was in high school, and the students continued to be segregated even after that. Native Americans occupied a marginal and alienated status.

My mother was a caseworker for the Department of Public Welfare, which further brought home to me the issues of social inequality. A large proportion of her "clients" were black or Native American, or so was my impression. Most people were of the opinion that black people and Indians were lazy, immoral, and satisfied to be on welfare rather than working. I wasn't sure about this conventional wisdom, as I had seen and known some black and Indian people who were hard-working and honorable people. The issues related to social class and race/ethnic inequality drew my attention as a boy and developed in later years into one of my main interests in sociology.

I was interested in all of the social sciences in college, but sociology seemed to satisfy the demands of my conscience to deal with the important social issues, as well as nourishing my curiosity about human behavior.

It was during the early years of graduate education that two things happened to give focus to my life and the uses of sociology. One was the development of the Civil Rights movement. That struggle, the ideas that it espoused as well as the activities that it embodied, moved me profoundly, as it did millions of others of my generation. Secondly, I became acquainted with the ideas of C. Wright Mills, a brilliant sociologist who was something of a maverick to the sociology establishment. It was Mills who spelled out the promise of the "sociological imagination" in a way that made it eminently relevant to the human condition, rather than just a fascinating intellectual enterprise. Later, another social movement, the anti-war movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, inspired me and dramatically showed once again how people could rise up collectively to make a difference in the behavior of governments. I was active in a minor way in both the Civil Rights and the peace movements.

My curiosity about human behavior and different lifestyles was fueled when I worked for several years as a desk clerk at a hotel in the downtown area of a city. The night life of a city, the colorful characters that I met, the subcultures which were often beyond the boundaries of legitimacy, these things all led me to develop an interest in the field of deviant behavior. As a naive youth from small towns, I was surprised to learn that a great variety of very likable and normal people lived lives that were little known, greatly misunderstood, and frequently condemned by "respectable" folks. Later, I was to write my doctoral dissertation on the subculture of a motorcycle gang.

I have now been teaching sociology for over twenty years, and have always found the introductory course to be the most challenging and the most satisfying. My perennial complaint is about the increasing size of classes in universities. I feel strongly that good education, at least in sociology, does not take place in huge classes of hundreds of students. Sociology deserves careful thought and reflection which should involve both oral and written communication among people to bring out its full meaning. I hope that the readers of this book have an environment which permits active, rather than passive learning.

# CONTENTS

PREFACE	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
PERSONAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE AUTHORS	xi
CHAPTER 1 THE FIELD OF SOCIOLOGY	1
<i>What Is Sociology?</i>	2
<i>The Origin of Sociology</i>	3
<i>Sociology and Other Social Sciences</i>	7
<i>Diversity in Sociology</i>	9
<i>Pure Sociology—Knowledge Of Social Reality</i>	16
<i>Applied Sociology—Knowledge for What?</i>	19
<i>Humanist Value-Oriented Sociology</i>	23
<i>Plan of the Book</i>	25
<i>Summary</i>	26

## **PART I: THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HUMAN SOCIOLOGY**

---

CHAPTER 2 HUMAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE	27
<i>Societies: Animal Strategies for Survival</i>	28
<i>How Human Societies Differ from Other Animal Societies</i>	28
<i>The Nature of Culture</i>	30
<i>A Definition of Culture</i>	33
<i>The Components of Non-Material Culture</i>	36
<i>Uniformity and Diversity Within a Culture: Subcultures</i>	39
<i>Cultural Dialectic—Countercultures</i>	40
<i>The Nature of Human Societies</i>	41
<i>Components of Social Structures</i>	42
<i>Ideal-Types of Society</i>	47
<i>Value Implications</i>	49
<i>Summary</i>	54
CHAPTER 3 GROUPS AND RELATIONSHIPS	55
<i>Human Collectivities</i>	56
<i>Types of Social Groups</i>	58

CHAPTER 3	GROUPS AND RELATIONSHIPS (cont.)	
	<i>Relationships Between Groups</i>	63
	<i>Formal Organizations and Bureaucracy</i>	66
	<i>Community</i>	75
	<i>Pseudo-Gemeinshcft</i>	80
	<i>Value Implications</i>	82
	<i>Summary</i>	84
CHAPTER 4	THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY	86
	<i>Issues of Social Psychology</i>	87
	<i>What Is Human Nature?</i>	88
	<i>Socialization</i>	90
	<i>Theories of Socialization</i>	94
	<i>The Presentation of Self in Society</i>	105
	<i>Socialization in Modernizing Societies</i>	107
	<i>Value Implications</i>	112
	<i>Summary</i>	115
CHAPTER 5	SOCIAL CONTROL AND DEVIANT BEHAVIOR	117
	<i>The Nature of Social Control</i>	118
	<i>Agents and Agencies of Social Control</i>	122
	<i>The Nature of Deviance</i>	127
	<i>Explanations of Deviance</i>	130
	<i>Trends in Social Control and Deviance</i>	136
	<i>Value Implications</i>	143
	<i>Summary</i>	146

## **PART II: THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETIES**

---

CHAPTER 6	THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF MODERN SOCIETIES	147
	<i>The Commercial Revolution and Its Consequences</i>	149
	<i>The Industrial Revolution and Its Consequences</i>	152
	<i>Emergence of the Nation-State</i>	162
	<i>Political Power and Authority</i>	164
	<i>The Cold War</i>	168
	<i>Capitalism versus Socialism</i>	171
	<i>Value Implications</i>	181
	<i>Summary</i>	183

CHAPTER 7	HUMAN ECOLOGY: PEOPLE, THE LAND, AND THE CITY	185
	<i>Demography</i>	186
	<i>World Population Explosion</i>	187
	<i>Malthus's Laws</i>	190
	<i>Declining Fertility</i>	193
	<i>The Theory of the Demographic Transition</i>	194
	<i>Environmental Overload</i>	199
	<i>Urbanization</i>	201
	<i>Urbanism as a Way of Life</i>	204
	<i>Anomie and City Life</i>	205
	<i>Anti-Urban Ethnocentrism</i>	207
	<i>Value Implications</i>	208
	<i>Summary</i>	212
CHAPTER 8	CLASS INEQUALITY	213
	<i>Social Inequality and Stratification</i>	214
	<i>Stratification in Nonindustrial Societies</i>	215
	<i>Stratification in Industrial Societies</i>	220
	<i>Multiple Dimensions of Class Inequality</i>	225
	<i>Class Stratification in Contemporary America</i>	227
	<i>World Stratification</i>	235
	<i>Value Implications</i>	236
	<i>Summary</i>	240
CHAPTER 9	RACE, ETHNIC, AND GENDER INEQUALITY	241
	<i>Minority Groups and Dominant Groups</i>	242
	<i>Techniques of Dominance</i>	245
	<i>Patterns of Intergroup Relations</i>	248
	<i>Ethnic and Racial Minorities in the United States</i>	255
	<i>Gender Inequality</i>	261
	<i>Value Implications</i>	271
	<i>Summary</i>	273
CHAPTER 10	FAMILIES IN TRANSITION	275
	<i>A Definition of the Family</i>	276
	<i>Varieties of Family Structure</i>	277
	<i>Modern Families and Premodern Families Compared</i>	282
	<i>Disintegration of Families</i>	284
	<i>Families as Loving Refuges in an Impersonal Society?</i>	287
	<i>Family Authority, Conflict, and Violence</i>	288
	<i>Class Differences Among Families</i>	290

CHAPTER 10	FAMILIES IN TRANSITION (cont.)	
	<i>The Future of the Family</i>	295
	<i>Value Implications</i>	299
	<i>Summary</i>	302
CHAPTER 11	EDUCATION AND RELIGION IN MODERN SOCIETIES	303
	<i>Formal Schooling: A Special Kind of Socialization</i>	304
	<i>Growth of Common, Mass, Secular, Public Education</i>	305
	<i>Higher Education in America</i>	311
	<i>Does It Pay to Go to College?</i>	312
	<i>Racism and Patriarchy in Education</i>	315
	<i>A Sociological Definition of Religion</i>	317
	<i>Varieties of Religion Among Societies</i>	320
	<i>Varieties of Religion Within Modern Societies</i>	321
	<i>Impacts of Religion on Society</i>	326
	<i>Secularization—Decline of Religion?</i>	329
	<i>Civil Religion?</i>	333
	<i>Value Implications</i>	333
	<i>Summary</i>	336
CHAPTER 12	SOCIAL CHANGE AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS	337
	<i>Human Actions and Social Change</i>	339
	<i>Trends in Modern Societies</i>	340
	<i>Sources of Change</i>	343
	<i>Social Movements</i>	349
	<i>The Future of Humankind and the Limits of Growth</i>	355
	<i>Value Implications</i>	360
	<i>Summary</i>	362
REFERENCES		364
PHOTO CREDITS		378
INDEX		379

## WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

In the United States more women are working outside the home than ever before. Over half of married women with young children are now in the work force compared with less than 10 percent in 1900 (Bureau of the Census, 1975, 1987). What effect does this change have on the relationships between husbands and wives? What effect does it have on child-rearing practices? What kinds of problems does the working woman face on the job? Does she have equality of opportunity in her career, or is she faced with discrimination?

There are more than thirteen million major crimes reported to police in the United States every year (U.S. Department of Justice, 1987). Is crime increasing or decreasing? What people are most likely to be arrested and convicted of crimes? What segments of the population are most at risk for becoming victims of crime? How does the United States compare with other nations in crime rates? What are the causes of crime? What can be done to prevent and control crime?

The Bureau of the Census (1985a) reported that 1 percent of Americans own 46 percent of all corporate stock. How many social classes are there in America and how are they described? Does America offer widespread opportunities for individuals to change their social class positions by determination and hard work? What are the differences in opportunities, values, and styles of life among the different social classes?

In 1988 an African-American politician, the Reverend Jesse Jackson, was a highly publicized candidate for president of the United States. Has racism disappeared as a significant factor in social relationships in this country? What is race, anyway? How are racial and other minority groups treated in other societies?

It is obvious that social change is occurring at a rapid rate in most societies on earth. For example, the Soviet Union's policy of *glasnost*, or "openness," is a dramatic break from its past policy. What are the causes of social change? Can people control and direct the changes, or are they simply caught up in forces which are beyond human control? Does social change lead to progress or to a deterioration in the quality of life?

These are some of the questions that sociologists ask and some of the topics that traditionally have challenged us. They are complex; we always have more questions than answers, but we consider it important to keep asking challenging questions and expanding our knowledge in response to them.

The sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959, pp. 6-7) argued that the greatest promise of what he called the *sociological imagination* is in its search for answers to three sorts of questions:

1. **What is the nature of a particular society?** What are its major components and how are they interrelated? How does this society differ from other societies?
2. **Where does this society stand in relationship to its past, that is, how is it changing?**
3. **What kind of people live in this society? In what ways are people in this society shaped, fulfilled, or repressed?**

In brief, Mills argued that the chief task of sociology was to understand the impact of social and historical forces upon individuals, not for the purpose of blindly accepting

fate, but to enable enlightened humans to make realistic choices and to take those actions that would really make a difference in their everyday lives.

As you can see, sociology is about people and the societies they live in. It is about the groups in which we find ourselves or from which we are excluded. It is also about our formation of new groups. Sociology studies the way groups are organized, or structured, and how organizations may persist or change through time. It is about the pains and joys of our lives: falling in love, being married, having children, being divorced, growing older, finding and losing jobs, being drafted, going to jail, and being a victim of crime. It is about a variety of human phenomena that are occurring now, have occurred in the past, and may occur in the future. Sociology's interests are vast and diverse, and yet it is a specialized field of study not to be confused with other fields such as the natural sciences, nor with other forms of thought about society such as psychology, theology, philosophy, or modern ideologies such as capitalism or socialism.

While no single definition of sociology is likely to be totally satisfactory, it may be useful at the beginning of our discussion to formulate a brief statement that approximates the substance of the discipline:

*Sociology is a systematic, scholarly discipline that seeks reliable, useful knowledge about human conduct, social relationships, groups, societies, and social change. It has developed several different theoretical perspectives and uses a variety of research methods.*

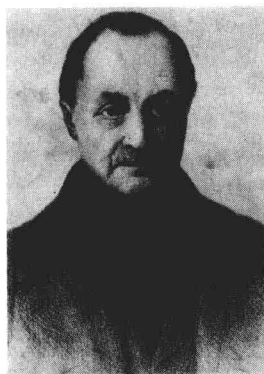
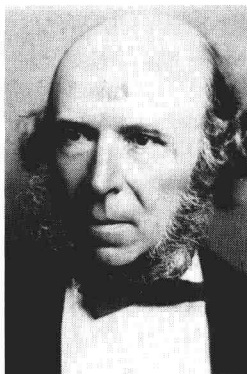
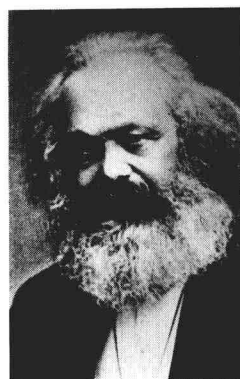
## THE ORIGIN OF SOCIOLOGY

---

Some insights into the nature of sociology may be gained by understanding something of its origins. Sociology arose during the first half of the nineteenth century in Western Europe, especially in France, Great Britain, and Germany. These societies were experiencing rapid social change in many different respects. Economic life was undergoing rapid transformation: expansion of trade in both internal and external markets, growing occupational specialization, the beginnings of the industrial revolution, and the growth of modern factories. Economic transformation stimulated extensive migration, especially from the countryside into growing cities. Political upheaval such as the French Revolution, its Reign of Terror, and the Napoleonic wars similarly triggered a rapid succession of political changes. A scientific revolution was rapidly altering human conceptions of the universe. For a growing and newly literate middle class, these and many other changes produced a new way of life that differed substantially from that of their ancestors—one that because of its newness could not be explained by the traditional, or conventional, knowledge received from legend, folklore, theology, or common sense. Yet these “modern” people had important questions about their existence, their purposes, and their futures.

Because of their countries' colonial subjugation of “foreign” regions in Africa, Asia, and the Western Hemisphere and their contact with “strange and exotic” ways of life, European peoples also became aware of a greater range of contrasts with their own ways of life. Patterns of human life could no longer be simply explained as human



*Auguste Comte**Herbert Spencer**Karl Marx**Émile Durkheim**Max Weber***PHOTO 1.1** Early Founders of Sociology

nature because they were too diverse. Just as change created a need for new understandings, so did the growing awareness of **human diversity**.

The success of the modern natural sciences in overturning older ideas about the universe and generating the means for increased human control over nature seemed to prove the supremacy of scientific knowledge over religion, magic, and other superstitions. The application of reason and systematic observation to the natural world easily invited the prospect that the same method could be applied to humans and their affairs. The replacement of traditional thought by scientific thought was, of course, met with **great resistance**, especially by guardians of conventional wisdom and existing institutional arrangements, such as the church and the state. The fight between science and religion over evolutionism in biology began in the 1860s and continues even today. Sociology, too, has a history of being opposed by those same guardians. Some conservative theologians and fundamentalist preachers have **condemned social scientists** for their godlessness. Right-wing politicians and newspaper columnists have attacked sociologists as enemies of the American way of life because their studies of the extent of racial and class inequalities in America have discredited the popular myths of America as an equal and just society.