INTRODUCTORY SOCIOLOGY

A BASIC SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL GUIDE

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PREFACE

Sociology is the science of human society. Just as people enjoy watching the actions of other people, sociologists observe people interacting with each other. However, sociologists observe in a systematic, or **scientific,** way. They perform experiments, they conduct surveys, and sometimes they just observe and record what people do. Their aim is to build a body of knowledge that allows them to understand, predict, and (sometimes) control social interaction.

Thus, the principles of sociology, and the data collected by sociologists over the past hundred years, concern many aspects of our lives. How do we learn the goals and aspirations that direct our lives? Why do we spend so many years in school? Where should we look for the causes of the problems that beset our society today? And how can we change things for the better? These issues affect us all, either directly or indirectly.

Sociology can provide answers to some of these important questions. But just as important as finding these "answers" is learning to **understand** sociology as a living process. This brief text will provide you with a solid understanding of the basic facts of sociology; it will introduce you to the sociological approach to human behavior; and it will teach you about the important directions in which sociology is moving today.

■ Using This Book

You will probably find this book very different from most textbooks you have read.

This is not a "review text," nor is it a "made easy" book. It **is** a **basic text.** Every module, or short section of text, presents the main points on one or two basic topics—the basic facts and ideas you must learn to become familiar with the subject. Because you focus on the essential topics, the learning process is speeded up.

You may already be familiar with some topics, while others will be quite new to you. Some modules you will find relatively simple to understand, while others will take more time and application. You may skip some modules because they do not interest you (if you are studying independently) or because they are not part of your program (if you are enrolled in a course). However, you should be able to **master the material in every module**—learn it thoroughly—if you make the effort.

■ The Self-Instructional Features

The subtitle of this book is "A Basic Self-Instructional Guide." This emphasizes its other main feature: you should use this book **actively**—not just absorb the material in a passive way. As you finish reading each module you will come to a brief set of review questions. Use these to check yourself quickly on what you have just read. Can you answer all the questions? If not, you should run over the last few pages again, and fix the essential points more firmly in your mind. You should not leave a module until you are sure you have learned what it has to teach you.

After each chapter of the text there is a longer **review text,** containing 30 questions. Sit down with a pencil and paper, and work out the answers. Many of the questions are similar to the module review questions. Others, however, draw from several different modules in the chapter. These questions are very important, for to answer them you must use what you have learned, fitting together old pieces of information into new patterns. The last three questions of each test are short essay questions. Each one asks you to write a few sentences about what you have just learned. These questions are the most important. They ask you to **create** something—to construct an argument or summarize a group of ideas in your own words. Thus, these questions invite you to review, critically, what you have learned and how well you have learned it.

■ Reviewing the Material

At the end of the book you will find the answers to the review tests. Each of these back pages is perforated, and the part of the page containing the answers may be taken out for easy

*reference—**after** you have completed the review test.* After each answer you will also find, printed in parentheses, one or more numbers. These refer back to the modules from which the questions are taken. If you miss any of the review questions, you should review once again the module or modules where the answers are found. And again, as with the individual modules, you should not leave a chapter until you are confident you have learned what is in it.

You will also find, at selected points throughout the book, general review tests, which cover material from several chapters of text. The general review tests are similar to the chapter reviews, with one difference: the last five questions, rather than the last three, call for essay answers. The answers to these tests are also found at the back of the book.

The general review tests can be used for periodic review of larger chunks of material. You may use them as soon as you come to them, or you may prefer to save them for review before examinations. In either case these tests are another valuable learning tool, and you should use the to check you mastery of the material.

■ Suggested Readings

Because this is a basic text, footnotes have been eliminated and technical references have been kept to a minimum. But many of you will find that your curiosity goes beyond what you can learn from this book alone. To guide you, a list of suggested readings has been provided at the end of the text. Some of these are original source materials, which can lead you to a better technical understanding. Others are more general and informal, and have been selected to enrich your "feel" for one or more topics. In each case, a short description is included in the list, to help you choose among the titles suggested. Use some of these readings to supplement your basic study, and you will soon develop a stronger, surer understanding of the subject.

■ Acknowledgments

The author is indebted to many people for their help in conceiving and executing this project. As with any book, the contributors are too numerous to name. From typists to rewriters and editors, all deserve special credit. Particular mention should be made Ken Friedman and Sharon Rule, who directed the book through its development and production, and of Peter Salwen, the BSIG series editor, who provided overall direction. Among the others who also deserve credit are Jeff Cooper, Ursula Gilbert, Ann Glennon, Eva Holzer, Judy Samuelson, and J. Wandres.

Joseph Curran, Jr.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE
WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

Leading thoughts:

- Sociology is a systematic method of observing and understanding human interactions
- Human behavior is patterned; it occurs in forms that repeat themselves time and again
- Sociologists collect and interpret data but are often not involved in decisions on the applications of their findings
- Ethical considerations arise in almost every aspect of sociological research

Sociology: The Science of Society 1

Throughout the world, people enjoy watching other people. In most places, traditional forms of people-watching have become incorporated into the fabric of society. The French and Italians have the sidewalk cafe; the Indians the tea stall. The Americans have the front porch, the park bench, large windows from which to view the world passing by. **Sociology** is a kind of people-watching. It is a science of human society based on the careful, systematic observation of people. A systematic method enables us to study and understand **patterns of behavior,** the things people do and the various ways they relate to each other.

Sociology is also another way of looking at the world. What aspects of the following do you think would interest sociologists? What patterns of human behavior might be exemplified by this illustration?

A man deep in thought walks slowly across a bridge, hearing nothing of the cars beside him. His face appears strained and tense. He turns, looks out over the water, then scrambles over the railing and jumps to his death.

"But if this scene contains only one individual," you might ask, "how can we talk about people and their patterned behavior?" Obviously, one scene does not contain a pattern of

behavior, but we know that this act of suicide is not an isolated event. Every year more than 23,000 people kill themselves. Sociologists try to identify the general consistencies in particular actions, and attempt to explain these patterns by collecting data to support or refute their ideas about these patterns. One of the central beliefs of sociology is that all human interaction is patterned. We might not see it or understand it, but the pattern is there. The job of the sociologist is to discover that pattern and then to explain it.

In this case, "the people" might include all those who have committed suicide and "the pattern of behavior" might relate to the backgrounds of people who take their own lives. "What kinds of people commit suicide?" a sociologist might ask. Are they young, old, male, female; Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish; white or non-white, and so on? "What are their social patterns?" Do they participate in groups? Are they overprotected by large families? Alternatively, are they loners, relatively unattached to the society around them? There are many different patterns that might be characteristic of people who end their own lives. Can you think of some other patterns that might be investigated by sociologists with respect to suicide?

Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of modern sociology, studied just this issue. We can trace the development of Durkheim's classic study, *Suicide,* to demonstrate the application of the scientific method. After examining the various psychological and biological explanations of suicide available to him at that time, Durkheim concluded that none of them explained the known variation in suicide rates between men and women, between the general population and residents of asylums, and between the mentally ill and the healthy. Accordingly, he formulated a **hypothesis**—an unproven statement about the possible relationship between factors. His hypothesis was that only social causes could account for the different rates of suicide. However, this statement, like all hypotheses, could only be verified by describing or measuring actual events—in this case, human activities. First, Durkheim decided to measure his concept of social causes, using the variables of individual religious affiliation, marital status, military service, and general economic and political stability. This is an **operationalized concept**—one defined in terms of variables that can be recorded and measured. For instance, you cannot measure "social causes," but you can measure the percentage of married and unmarried people, or of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews who commit suicide. Likewise, you can measure suicide as the number of individuals, out of every 100,000 members of the population, who take their lives each year. Durkheim believed that the suicide rate, the **dependent variable**—one that changes when other factors change—would vary with each of these social factors, the **independent variables**—those that remain stable within the confines of the research.

Durkheim supported some of his hypotheses with data collected from official records on suicide. For instance, he found fewer suicides among married people than single people, and more among Protestants than among Catholics or Jews. The relationships between these factors did not explain, however, why the variations existed. That required an interpretation of the data and a formulation of a theory. A **theory** is a logical series of ideas that show the interrelationship of facts.

Durkheim's theory was that people with strong bonds to social groups, to a community, are less likely to take their own lives than unaffiliated people. Durkheim also constructed a more general theory of the relationships between the individual and society: society influences what individuals do, the way they think, and the way they behave. With this theory, he developed more hypotheses to be tested by further research.

Theories allow sociologists to predict future events. While a theory is considered to be an explanation of events, the test of a theory, or explanation, is in its ability to predict. When a theory no longer predicts, the search for some alternative theoretical explanation begins

Of course, sociologists study normal, as well as abnormal, patterns of behavior. Consider the following scene:

It is a quiet evening on a main street of an American city of 150,000. The movie began a few minutes ago, but a few latecomers, two couples and a single male, straggle into the the-

ater. What general patterns might be exemplified here? Evening activities in a medium-size city? The tendency to socialize as couples in our society? What pattern is implied by the single male attending the movies? These are all elements of the scene which might exemplify general patterns in our society. The next time you go to the movies, stop to watch people enter. What kinds of groups go to the movies? What patterns do you see? What hypotheses come to mind about which sociologists would inquire further?

The following third scene is superficially simple, but opens a sociological can of worms:

10:30 P.M. The subway car is carrying five passengers as it rumbles along under city streets. Four whites sit on one bench at the near end of the corner. The fifth rider, a black teenager, sits alone at the far end of the car. Is the seating arrangement on the subway representative of other patterns of interaction in the society? How did the arrangement come about? Who sat down first? Where? Perhaps we are dealing with a tendency to segregate certain age groups, or with racial prejudice. You probably assumed that the fifth passenger was male even though it was unspecified in the scene. What pattern of interaction does that imply? Again, we find that a single event raises many questions about which hypotheses may be generated for further investigation.

Hypotheses about the patterns of human interaction raised by a single event, or many events, are limited only by the boundaries of the imagination and creativity of the observers. Many different social patterns may be discerned in any event. However, no single event provides enough evidence to let us predict future social behavior. In order to establish general rules of prediction, a sociologist has to rely on the aid of a scientific method. This scientific method tempers his intellectual flights of fancy with careful observation and verifiable measurements.

It is the aim of this text to trace the development of the science of sociology, and to describe briefly some of the tools employed by sociologists in research. Almost any facet of social life is fertile ground for sociologists. The text will describe how sociologists perceive human behavior and how a scientific approach can help us understand society

Before you go on . . .

1. Sociology is a science of _____.
2. Define patterns of behavior.
3. The sociologist attempts to see a _____ in every human interaction.
4. One of the first people to employ a scientific method to collect data about human behavior was _____.
5. A hypothesis is an unproven statement which attempts to demonstrate a relationship between variables. True or false?
6. An operationalized concept is one that is defined in terms of variables which can be recorded and measured. True or false?
7. A theory is any speculation about facts or events. True or false?

Answers:

1. Human society and interaction.
2. Patterns of behavior are ways in which people commonly relate to one another.
3. Pattern of behavior.
4. Emile Durkheim.
5. True. A hypothesis is an unproven idea which can be confirmed or refuted by research.
6. True.
7. False. A theory is a logical series of ideas that show the interrelationship of facts and can predict future events.

2 *Methods of Sociology I*

Like all scientists, sociologists attempt to gather and analyze empirical data in an objective manner. Because they deal with other human beings, however, sociologists must sometimes have greater insight into their own attitudes and biases than would physicists or astronomers. Nevertheless, sociological procedures and techniques for making observations are fundamentally similar to those employed by other sciences.

One method of gathering information is called **survey research.** Survey research employs questionnaires, interviews, or a combination of the two to ask people specific questions. The purpose of these questions is to collect data in order to form a basis for predicting behavior, testing hypotheses, or discerning public opinion. The people who are selected to participate in a survey are referred to as a **sample.** The sample is chosen from a **population**—from those people who have the characteristics which are being studied. In an election poll, for example, the population might include all registered voters in a particular state and the sample would be that portion of the population questioned for the survey.

There are several ways in which a sample may be chosen. A **random sample** is one in which all members of the population have an equal chance of being chosen. For instance, if we were investigating attitudes toward pornography we might decide to question every one hundredth head of a household or every five hundredth name in the telephone book. The random sample is designed to remove the influence of the researcher's preferences on the sample. The validity of this kind of survey is not necessarily enhanced by increasing the size of the sample. It is not the size, but the extent to which the sample is representative of the whole population, that determines the survey's accuracy. For example, television rating services poll

a very small segment of the American population to determine our viewing habits; however, that sample is very carefully chosen to represent a true cross-section of the television-viewing public.

There are many other factors involved in designing and administering an accurate survey. The way in which a question is worded will affect the way in which it is answered. Obviously, a survey becomes meaningless if the respondents misunderstand the questions. Then too, a respondent may not answer truthfully. In a personal interview, respondents may offer the answers which they believe the interviewer wants to hear. Many people, for example, might represent themselves as more liberal on questions dealing with racial prejudice in a face-to-face interview than they would in an anonymous questionnaire.

The tasks of interviewing and designing a questionnaire require highly specialized skills. Researchers must be skilled at designing questions that permit a wide range of answers. "When did you stop beating your wife?" is not an acceptible survey question. Researchers often repeat the same question in a different form to check the validity of the data. Moreover, they must ask the questions as planned, without paraphrasing or asides. Careful training is the only way personal bias and hidden assumptions can be eliminated from survey research.

Sociologists generally use highly structured questions in conducting a survey. It would be almost impossible to analyze the results of a survey which posed an open-ended question such as "What do you think of Mr. X as a candidate?" Instead, researchers design closed-ended questions which can be answered by a "yes" or "no" response, by multiple choice, or by indicating agreement or disagreement on a scale of one to five. For example: "Mr. X's tax program is unfair to the poor. Do you strongly disagree; slightly disagree; slightly agree; strongly agree; don't know?"

Often sociologists use planned experiments to explore a hypothesis. The **subjects,** or people on whom an experiment is performed, are exposed to carefully designed situations. Their responses are recorded. By holding all variables constant except the one being tested, sociologists can study the relationships involved in social phenomena.

Researchers may use a control group to test the validity of their results. The **control group** undergoes the same experience as the experimental group except for the one variable that is being tested. Both groups, for example, may be given the same task to perform, but only the experimental group will be exposed periodically to irritating noises, the independent variable. If all other conditions are alike, the researcher may assume that it is the noise which accounts for any differences in performance, the dependent variable, between the two groups.

Sociological experimentation may take place either in a laboratory or in a field setting. In a laboratory experiment, subjects come to the researcher. They may be paid for their participation, and they may or may not be informed of the actual purpose of the experiment. In a field experiment, the researcher takes the experiment to the people being studied. While field experiments offer more "true-to-life" circumstances, laboratory experiments permit the control of more variables.

In the early 1970s, Philip Zimbardo designed and conducted a laboratory experiment to study the effects of the prison environment on guards and inmates. Zimbardo hypothesized that the abnormal behavior associated with prisons was a product of the situation and not the individual personalities of the people involved. Rather than observe conditions in an actual prison, Zimbardo decided to conduct his study in a simulated prison, using student volunteers as his subjects. This method allowed him to control and manipulate **the independent variable**—the situation, **the dependent variable**—behavior, and many other factors that could affect the experiment. By using 24 college students matched for ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, Zimbardo reduced the effect of individual personality differences between inmates and guards. The students were then randomly assigned to roles as inmates or guards.

The experiment began in a more dramatic manner than the participants might have expected. One night, the prisoners were unexpectedly picked up at their homes by a city

	experimental group (given hot chicken soup)	**control group (not given hot chicken soup)**
before	100 people with colds	100 people with colds
after	11 people with colds	11 people with colds
difference	89 "cures"	89 "cures"

Imaginary experiment to test the hypothesis that hot chicken soup will cure a cold. The experimental group was given chicken soup and the control group was not. In this experiment the chicken soup was the independent variable and the cold was the dependent variable. After a period of time, 11 people in each group still had colds. What do the results indicate?

policeman in a squad car. They were driven to the station house where they were searched, fingerprinted, and handcuffed. They were then taken, blindfolded, to a simulated prison in the basement of a Stanford University building, where they were stripped, deloused, put into uniforms, and assigned numbers. The prisoners understood that they would receive $15 a day to spend the next two weeks in a cell with two other prisoners.

The experiment was called off after only six days. In less than a week, Zimbardo observed, the subjects were generally unable to distinguish between reality and the role they were playing. About a third of the guards had become tyrannical in their abuse of power. They took advantage of every opportunity to break the spirit of their captives. The prisoners, in turn, behaved as broken and desperate men with no sense of common interests. When the guards put one of the prisoners into solitary confinement in a closet, the inmates were told the man would be let out only if they agreed to give up their blankets. The prisoners voted to keep their blankets. A former prison chaplain who spoke to the prisoners after only four days reported that they were exactly like first-time inmates he had met in real prisons.

Zimbardo concluded that the mere labeling and identification of individuals as prisoners or guards is enough to elicit pathological behavior from them. Furthermore, the personalities of the people involved are of very little significance in determining their behavioral pattern. It is the very nature of the prison situation that lowers the self-esteem of prisoners and guards to a point where their ethical and moral inclinations are overshadowed.

Thus, the results of Zimbardo's experiment supported his hypothesis. The data demonstrated that the dependent variable, the behavior patterns of the inmates and guards, changed when the independent variable, the prison environment, changed. In this experiment, the control group consisted of the 24 students before they entered the simulated prison environment. The abormal behavior in the prison contrasted sharply with the normal behavior of the same group in a university setting.

While the general process of hypothesis testing is common to all sociological research,

the specific research tools vary. So far, we have discussed surveys and experiments. The next module will discuss other research tools used by sociologists.

Before you go on . . .

1. People who participate in a survey are called a(n) _____.
2. In a survey, the sample is drawn from the _____.
3. Experiments may be performed in either a(n) _____ or in _____.
4. A control group undergoes the same experience as the experimental group except for _____.
5. Questions in a survey must be phrased in a very structured way, rather than an open-ended one. True or false?
6. Survey research employs interviews, questionnaires, or a combination of the two to obtain data. True or false?
7. Researchers have shown that it is impossible to elicit pathological behavior from ordinary subjects by placing them in certain situations. True or false?

Answers:

1. Sample.
2. Population.
3. Laboratory ; the field.
4. The variable being tested.
5. True. An open-ended question will not provide comparable answers.
6. True. Survey research collects specific data from a large sample using these techniques.
7. False. The Zimbardo experiment indicates that the situation can generate abnormal behavior in otherwise normal people.

Methods of Sociology II 3

Many sociologists have criticized laboratory experiments, such as Zimbardo's, because they feel the experimenters are forcing the subjects to give the desired responses. Zimbardo had the guards "count" the prisoners once every eight hours, to promote interaction in an

otherwise boring setting. Was he forcing them to behave in abnormal ways? Did the awareness that they were subjects in an experiment give the participants official "permission" to behave abnormally?

While the answers to these questions are not clear, one possible solution is to use field experiments in place of laboratory experiments. Even field experiments, however, are not immune to subtle forms of interaction between the researchers and the subjects.

In 1939, an experiment was conducted at Western Electric's Hawthorne plant in Chicago. The purpose was to determine the effect on work output of variations in lighting, rest periods, temperature, and humidity. To their surprise, researchers discovered that any change increased work output. Decreasing the number of rest periods proved to be as effective in increasing work output as increasing the number of rest periods! The fact that people tend to behave differently when they know that they are being observed was dubbed the **Hawthorne effect.** Should sociologists combat the Hawthorne effect by performing experiments without the knowledge of their subjects? Can meaningful conclusions be derived from simulated situations in an experimental environment? There are no simple answers to these questions. Often the issues being studied and the questions being asked determine the research methods to be used. For instance, sociologists cannot perform experiments on suicide; nor can they study work output with a survey.

Participant observation, another research technique, is one of the oldest methods used by sociologists. Participant observers become personally involved in whatever they are studying. If they wish to observe the inner workings of a religious cult, for example, they might arrange to join the cult and participate as fully as possible in its rituals. Studying a social phenomenon from the inside allows the participant observer to experience the feelings and ideas of the people in a way that an outsider could not. The white novelist who traveled through the South disguised as a black man learned different things about black life in America than he could have learned through interviews or questionnaires. How might a sociologist go about conducting a participant–observer study of a juvenile gang?

The participant–observer technique also has many potential drawbacks and limitations. Should observers reveal their intentions to the people they are observing? If they do, will their subjects behave as they normally would? If observers don't reveal themselves, are they behaving dishonestly or unethically? Can sociologists participate in a group activity without affecting the behavior of the other participants? Should sociologists who are studying gangs interfere with the harassment of members of other gangs? Finally, participant observers usually involve themselves with a relatively small sample of the population and their conclusions may tend to be rather biased as well as narrow in scope.

All sociological research, whether it involves a survey, an experiment, or participant observation, is affected by the element of time. Neither people nor the institutions they create remain static. In formulating their conclusions, sociologists must consider that things sometimes change more slowly than can be readily detected. One way of dealing with this problem is the use of a **cross-sectional** study—one that simultaneously examines segments of a population at different stages of development. Sociologists wanting to investigate the potential income of college students could simply survey the income of college graduates at different ages. They would not have to wait for today's students to graduate and develop careers to collect the data. Although this method is relatively quick and efficient, it presupposes that change is constant from one period of time to another. But to what extent will the college student of today be like the college graduates of today when he reaches their age?

An alternative to the cross-sectional study is a study which follows a single group of people over a period of time, a **longitudinal study.** Obviously, this method is extremely slow, and it is sometimes impossible to keep track of a diverse group of individuals over the course of many years. Imagine the work involved in locating a large sample of college students 20 years from now to determine their income. Such long-range studies of change are fascinating, but they are

often limited to cases where official records have been collected over a long period of time. For instance, the relationship between suicide rates and stock prices can be determined by a longitudinal study.

Gathering information is only one part of the sociologist's job. Interpreting the data and formulating accurate conclusions often proves to be the most difficult part of a sociological study. It is not always easy to interpret the relationship between the variables to determine whether a hypothesis has been proven or disproven.

Moreover, sociologists must be scrupulously logical in interpreting their findings if they want their conclusions to be valid. It is sometimes difficult to overcome preconceptions and faulty reasoning when dealing with human behavior. Can you find the logical fallacies in the following statements?

It isn't safe to walk at night in that neighborhood! A woman was robbed there just last week!

Rhonda must hate Chinese food! We went to a Chinese restaurant last night and she didn't eat a thing!

Finally, sociologists do not attempt to arrive at conclusions which are valid for all people at all times. Rather, they try to employ scientific methods of gathering and interpreting information in order to reach a clearer understanding of how frequently an event might occur; of why groups of people tend to behave as they do. Sociologists cannot, of course, predict exactly what is going to happen at a specific place or time to any one individual. Like all scientists, however, they can predict trends and the probability that an event will take place.

Before you go on . . .

1. **Laboratory experiments have been criticized for creating situations in which the subjects are pressured to produce the desired behavior. True or false?**
2. **The fact that people behave differently when they are being observed is called _____.**
3. **_____ involves studying social phenomena as a member of the group.**
4. **After data have been collected, the researcher must interpret it in order to form _____.**
5. **A cross-sectional study tries to study change by collecting data at one point in time.**
6. **Longitudinal studies are another way of accounting for the element of change. True or false?**
7. **Once data is collected and interpreted, the conclusions will hold true for all people at most times. True or false?**

Answers:

1. True. Researchers unintentionally tend to load the experimental situation to produce results consistent with their hypotheses.
2. The Hawthorne effect.
3. Participant observation.
4. A conclusion.
5. True. It studies different groups at the same time to draw conclusions about change.
6. True. Long-range studies permit the sociologist to examine change.
7. False. The sociologist is not a fortune-teller. He can only predict frequency of events or suggest why a behavior occurs.

4 *Sociological Perspectives*

Modern sociology has had a surprisingly short life. Throughout history, people have been interested in understanding how their societies operate. A serf may have been interested in the hierarchy of his feudal society. But it was not until the 17th century, with the work of such men as Bacon and Descartes, that the systematic observation of society replaced musings on philosophy, politics, and religion.

The French philosopher Henri de Saint-Simon was the first to employ a scientific method for understanding people in a social context. Saint-Simon's student and colleague, Auguste Comte, dubbed this new discipline "sociology" in 1838 and began to outline the fundamental principles of the social science. Comte viewed the intellectual growth of humankind as an evolutionary process. He argued that a better world could be created through scientific discipline. According to Comte, observation and experimentation are essential tools in the never-ending quest for a better life.

Many thinkers adopted this approach in an effort to solve some of Europe's most pressing problems. With the Industrial Revolution and the movement of hundreds of thousands of people from the countryside to the city came poverty, crime, broken families and disease. Vastly different solutions were proposed. Herbert Spencer, an English writer of the late nineteenth century, believed that societies evolve to their optimum condition through the process of social **natural selection** in which the weak are weeded out by the strong. It was in the formulation of this view that Spencer coined the famous phrase "survival of the fittest." According to Spencer, social conditions will improve most rapidly when left alone; planning was equated with interference in natural processes. He therefore opposed national legislation in such fields as public education and health care, arguing that those members of society who are most fit for survival will effectively fulfill their own needs.