IAN ROBERTSON

SOCIOLOGY

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Sociology

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Preface

There are two basic premises behind this book. The first is that sociology is both a humanistic art and a rigorous science; in fact much of its excitement arises from the insights offered by this unique blend of two intellectual traditions. The second premise is that sociology can be, and should be, a profoundly liberating discipline. By challenging the conventional wisdoms of the past and by dissolving the myths about social reality, the discipline provides an acute awareness of the social authorship of and responsibility for both the social world and much of our personal experience and identity. Sociology thus offers that crucial sense of options and choice that is essential to human freedom.

The impetus to write this book grew out of several years' experience as a teacher and professional journalist in radically different societies in North America, Europe, and Africa. I will count the book successful to the extent that it conveys to the reader the fascination and sheer pleasure that I draw from sociology myself.

Coverage

I decided at the outset not to write a slender "core" text covering a few selected topics. The problem with such an approach, of course, is that one person's core may be another's apple—or vice versa—with the result that some instructors are left without text discussion of material they consider essential. Instead, I have tried to give a broad and thorough coverage of the main fields of the discipline, while keeping the text sufficiently flexible to be adapted to the needs of individual instructors. The book thus provides full coverage of the "traditional" material in the introductory sociology course. It seemed to me important, however, that the text should do much more: that it should also convey a strong sense of the "cutting edge" of the discipline, of the vital issues and trends in contemporary sociology. For this reason, I have included much material that is unusual or even unique in an introductory book. A full chapter, for example, is devoted to the sociology of science, a subject of great potential interest to any student in modern society and perhaps of particular interest to those science majors who may take only one sociology course. There is also an entire chapter on the micro order, in which symbolic interactionist and dramaturgical approaches are applied to the ordinary routines of everyday life. A chapter is devoted, too, to the sociology of sexual behavior, a subject of high student interest and one admirably suited to illustrate the interplay of biological, social, and cultural factors in the shaping of human behavior. There are also discussions of many other fields of current interest, such as ecological concerns, body language, the sociology of death, and ethical problems in sociological research. A full chapter is also accorded to the topic of sex roles—and I have taken care throughout the book to avoid sexist language, with its unintended yet inevitable implication that it is only men who do, and act, and create the social world.

Organization

The book has been divided into five units. Unit I provides an introduction to sociology and to the methods of sociological research. Unit II deals with the individual, culture, and society, and focuses on the influence of social and cultural forces on personal experience and social behavior. The chapters in this unit cover culture, society, socializa-

tion, social interaction, social groups, deviance, and sexual behavior. Unit III discusses various forms of social inequality, and emphasizes the role of ideology as well as coercion and tradition in the maintenance of inequalities. The first chapter in the unit deals with the general problem of social stratification and introduces basic concepts; the second deals with social class in the United States; the third, with race and ethnic relations; and the fourth, with sex roles. Unit IV discusses several important social institutions: the family, education, religion, science, the economic order, and the political order. Finally, Unit V focuses on some issues of social order and social change; it contains chapters on population and ecology, urbanization and urban life, collective behavior and social movements, and on the general problem of social change itself.

I have taken great care, however, to structure the book in such a way that instructors can, if they wish, omit some chapters and present others in a different order. Nearly all instructors will want to cover the first five chapters, in which the most important terms and concepts of the discipline are introduced. The sequence of the remaining chapters can then be freely rearranged to suit the convenience of the individual instructor, and there are ample cross-references to the five basic chapters and to relevant topics in other chapters to facilitate any alternative sequence.

Features

The book contains a number of distinctive features that have been included to enhance its effectiveness as a teaching and learning tool.

Cross-cultural material. While this book is not in any sense intended as an exercise in comparative sociology, I have started from the assumption—a surprisingly unusual one—that sociology is something more than the study of American society. Throughout the text there are occasional references to other cultures and to the historical past. This material is intended to serve two purposes. The first is to enliven the text, for the ways of life of other peoples—particularly in so-called "primitive" societies—are inherently fascinating. The second purpose, more serious, is to undermine ethnocentric attitudes by highlighting, through comparison, distinctive aspects of American society that might otherwise pass unnoticed or be taken for granted.

Theory. A basic sociology text should not, in my view, be a heavily theoretical one. But conversely, a sound introduction to sociological theory should be an essential feature of the introductory course, and we fail both the discipline and our students if we do not provide it. The treatment of theory in this book is shaped by two convictions. The first is that theory can be presented in a clear, concise, interesting, and understandable manner, and that its practical value can be readily appreciated by the student. The second conviction is that theory must not, as happens all too often, be briefly introduced in the first chapter and then hastily buried: this tactic can only confirm the student's worst suspicions that theory is an irrelevant luxury.

I have taken a fairly eclectic approach to sociological theory and have utilized all three of the main perspectives in the contemporary discipline: functionalist theory (primarily for issues of social order and stability), conflict theory (primarily for issues of social tension and change) and interactionist theories (primarily for "micro" issues). Above all, I have carried these perspectives throughout the book—not by applying them mechanically to everything, but by introducing particular theoretical perspectives where they will genuinely enhance understanding of a specific problem. Where the perspectives complement one another, as they often do, this is made clear; where they seem contradictory, the problem is discussed. I have drawn extensively, of course, on the ideas of contemporary sociologists; but in keeping with the current resurgence of interest in classical thinkers I have given due emphasis to such writers as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber.

Readings. A number of readings from original sources are included at appropriate places in the text. These readings have been chosen for their interest and relevance, and are designed to give the student a deeper, more firsthand experience of sociological writing and research.

Pedagogical aids. Several features of the book are designed to aid the learning process. Each chapter begins with a brief overview of its major topics and closes with a numbered, point-by-point summary of the contents. All important terms are italicized and defined where they first appear, and unfamiliar terms are illustrated by an example.

These terms are also listed for end-of-chapter review. Throughout the book there are occasional "boxes" containing short and relevant items of interest. The book is abundantly illustrated with photographs, many of them in full color. The photographs have been carefully selected for pedagogical rather than merely decorative reasons, and are accompanied by unusually full captions that reinforce and amplify the text material. Numerous tables and charts, up-to-date and easy to read, are used to aid the student's understanding of concepts and sociological data. Each chapter also contains an annotated list of suggestions for further reading.

Glossary. The book contains an extensive glossary—virtually a mini-dictionary—of over three hundred important sociological terms. The glossary can be used both for ready reference and for reviewing purposes.

Library research techniques. I have included a brief appendix on techniques of library research. This appendix is intended as a handy guide to library facilities; it offers many suggestions for tracking down sources and information and should prove useful to students working on term papers or research projects.

Supplementary materials

A Study Guide is available to help students in both their understanding and their reviewing of the course. The guide, prepared by Diana K. Harris and William E. Cole (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), includes learning objectives, a chapter synopsis, multiple-choice questions, word scramble questions, true-false questions, completion questions, and a term finder.

The text also is complemented by a comprehensive *Instructor's Manual* by Donald P. Irish (Hamline University) and a *Test Bank* of 1000 four-choice multiple-choice questions.

Thanks

Many people have helped in the preparation of this book. I am especially grateful to a number of my colleagues who evaluated various parts of the manuscript for accuracy, coverage, readability, currency, and teachability. The book owes a great deal to the many constructive criticisms and suggestions they offered. The reviewers were:

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Of course, I have not always agreed with the reviewers (nor have they always agreed with one another!) and the responsibility for the final manuscript is entirely my own.

Finally, I have been fortunate to be associated with Worth Publishers, a young and vigorous company with a well-deserved reputation for its commitment to quality at every stage of the publishing process. My sincere thanks go to the staff of Worth for the effort they put into this book.

New York City
February, 1977

IAN ROBERTSON

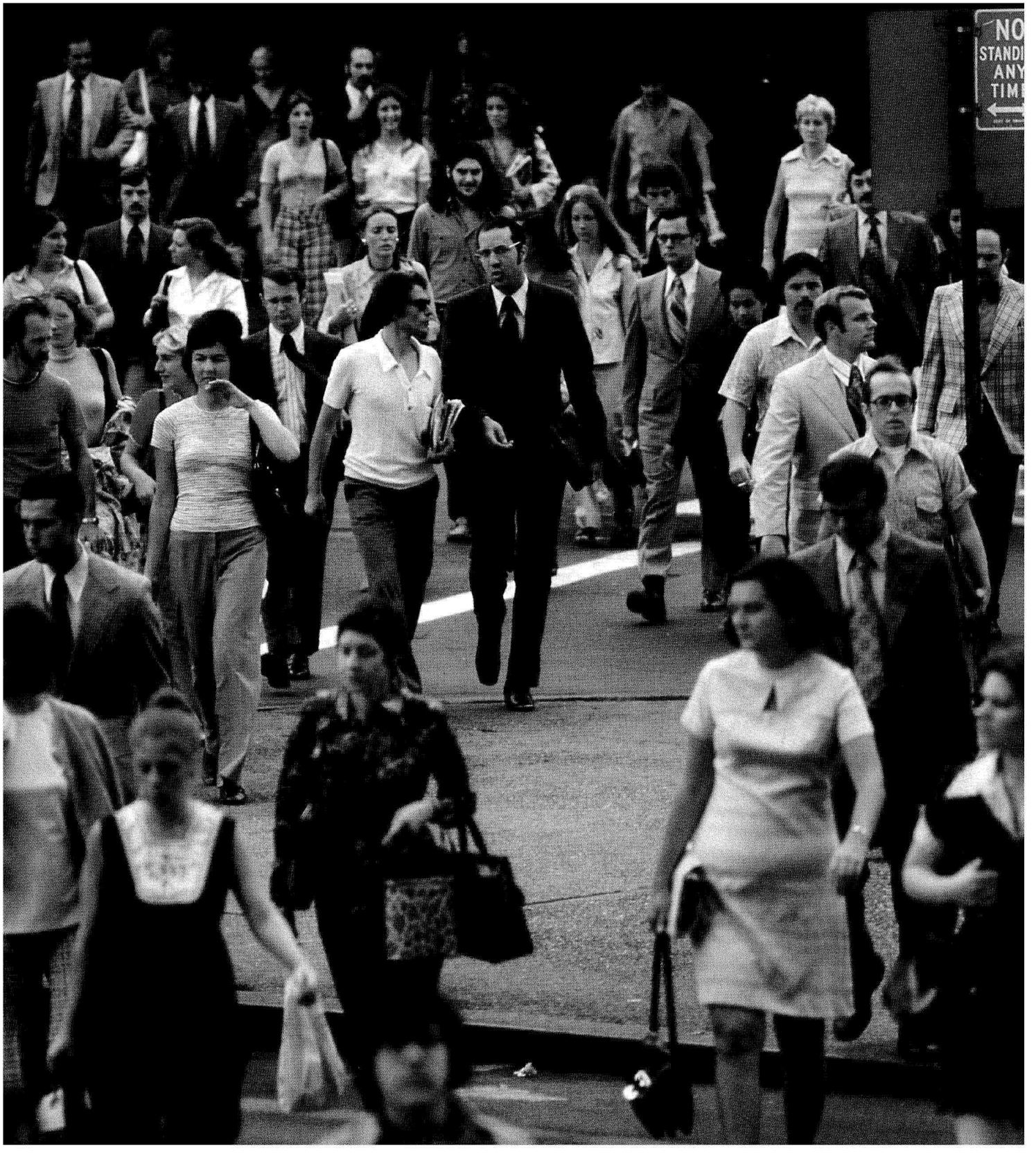
Contents

UNIT 1 *Introduction to Sociology*

Like any subject that deals with people, sociology is inherently fascinating. This introductory unit explains what sociology is, what sociologists do, and how they go about their work. In it you will discover sociology's distinctive perspective on human society and social behavior.

The first chapter offers you a general overview of the discipline, presenting sociologists as "strangers" in the familiar landscape of their own society: in other words, as people who look afresh at the world others take for granted. The chapter explains the "sociological imagination"—the vivid awareness you will gain of the close link between personal experience and wider social forces. It discusses also the scientific nature of sociology, the relationship of sociology to other social sciences, the history of the discipline, and the major theoretical approaches that sociologists use to make sense of their subject matter.

The second chapter discusses the methods that sociologists use to investigate the social world. Sociological research is essentially a form of detective work, in which the sociologist tries to find out what is happening in society and why. The value of the sociologist's conclusions is obviously influenced by the accuracy and reliability of the methods that are used to collect and analyze the evidence. The chapter thus examines the problems of tracing cause and effect in social behavior, the unique difficulties that sociologists face in their research, and the methods that they use to uncover the facts about social life.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CHAPTER 1 *Sociology: A New Look at a Familiar World*

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Alone among living creatures, human beings are self-aware—capable of inquiring and reflecting about themselves. Throughout history, our ancestors pondered human nature as it is revealed in the social life of our species. Why do human beings form families and why do they worship gods? Why is the way of life of one group so different from that of another? What makes some people break social rules while others obey them? Why are some people rich when others are poor? What makes one group go to war with another? What might a human being be like who had not been raised in the company of other people? What holds societies together, and why do all societies constantly change over time?

Until quite recently the answers to these and similar questions came from intuition, from speculation, and from the dead weight of myth, superstition, and traditional "folk wisdom" handed down from the past. Only in the course of the last century or so has a new method been applied to the study of human society and social behavior: the method of science, which provides answers drawn from facts collected by systematic research.

This new mode of inquiry has produced the lively but still infant discipline of sociology. *Sociology is the scientific study of human society and social behavior.* The subject matter of sociology is huge, complex, and varied, and the knowledge produced by sociological research is still imperfect in many ways. Yet, in the brief century and a half that the discipline has been in existence, it has taught us a great deal about ourselves that we could never have learned by relying on speculation alone. We have learned to conceive of human beings and social life in an entirely new way—a way that you will find sometimes disconcerting but always fascinating.

Sociology as a Perspective

The world does not consist of a reality that everyone sees in exactly the same way. A house may seem to be simply a house, but different people will look at and interpret it quite differently. The architect will see it in one way, the realtor in a second, the prospective buyer in a third, the artist in a fourth, the demolition expert in a fifth, and so on. Each of these people brings a distinctive perspective to bear on the same subject and sees quite different things as a result. In the same way, sociology offers a particular perspective on society and social behavior, a perspective quite unlike that of, say, the poet, the philosopher, the theologian, the lawyer, or the police officer.

The sociological perspective invites us to become strangers in the familiar landscape of our society. It allows us to look afresh at a world we have always taken for granted, to examine our own surroundings with the same curiosity and fascination that we might bring to an exotic, alien culture. As Peter Berger (1963) has observed, sociology is nothing less than a special form of consciousness. It encourages us to focus on features of our social environment that we have never noticed before and to interpret them in a new and richer light. Sociology gives us a window on the wider world that lies beyond our immediate experience, leading us into areas of society that we might otherwise have ignored or misunderstood. Our own view of the world is shaped by our personal experience of it. Sociology shows us the worlds of the rich and the powerful, the poor and the weak, the worlds of slum dwellers and addicts, religious zealots and criminal gangs. Because these people have different social experiences, they have quite different definitions of social reality. Sociology enables us to appreciate viewpoints other than our own, to understand how these viewpoints came into being, and in the process, to better understand ourselves, our attitudes, and our own lives.

Figure 1.1 To an outsider, the appearance and behavior of this New Guinea tribesman may seem bizarre. In the context of his own society, however, the ritual in which he is taking part is perfectly understandable. Legend has it that members of the tribe once hid from their enemies in a riverbed. When they emerged, covered with white mud, their enemies mistook them for ghosts and fled. The ritual commemorates this event. The sociological perspective invites us to apply the same curiosity to our own society that we might apply to others, examining with fresh insights the behavior that we have always taken for granted. Sociologists are in a sense "outsiders" in their own society.

The Basic Insight

Sociology starts from the premise that we are basically social animals—not just from force of habit but because we could not otherwise survive. We live out our brief lives, for better or worse, in a society that existed long before we were born and will exist long after we are gone. We are all born into human groups and derive our identities, hopes, fears, troubles, and satisfactions from them. The basic insight of sociology is this: *human behavior is largely shaped by the groups to which people belong and by the social interaction that takes place within those groups.* We are what we are and we behave the way we do because we happen to live in particular societies at particular points in space and time. If you had been born, say, a modern Chinese peasant, or an

African pygmy, or an ancient Greek, or a feudal aristocrat, your personality, your options in life, and your social experience would be utterly different. This fact seems obvious enough, but it is easily overlooked. People everywhere tend to take their social world for granted, accepting their society and its customs as unquestioningly as they do the physical world that also surrounds them. But the sociological perspective enables us to see society not as something to be taken for granted as "natural" but as a temporary social product, created by human beings and therefore capable of being changed by them as well.

The main focus of sociology is the group, not the individual. Studies of particular individuals are useful to sociologists, but the sociologist is mainly interested in the *interaction* between people—the ways in which people act toward, respond to, and influence one another. All social behavior, from shaking hands to murder, and all social institutions, from religion to the family, are ultimately the product of social interaction. The group, then, provides the sociologist's main frame of reference—whether the group being studied is as small as a gang or a rock band, as large as a city or an ethnic community, or as vast as a modern industrial society.

The Sociological Imagination

This emphasis on the group always leads back to the individual, however, for it is only by understanding society that we can fully understand ourselves. C. Wright Mills (1959) described the perspective of the discipline as "the sociological imagination"—a vivid awareness of the relationship between private experience and the wider society. People usually see the world through their limited experience in a small orbit of family, relatives, friends, and fellow workers. This viewpoint places blinkers on their view of the wider society. But it does more than that. Paradoxically, it also places blinkers on their view of their own personal worlds, for those worlds are shaped by broader social forces that can easily pass unrecognized. The "sociological imagination" allows us to escape from this cramped personal vision—to stand apart mentally from our own place in society and to see with a new clarity the link between private troubles and social events.

When a society becomes industrialized, rural peasants become urban workers, whether they like it or not. When

Strangers in a Familiar World

Anthropologists use the term "culture shock" to describe the impact of a totally new culture upon a newcomer. In an extreme instance such shock will be experienced by the Western explorer who is told, halfway through dinner, that he is eating the nice old lady he had been chatting with the previous day. Most explorers no longer encounter cannibalism in their travels today. However, the first encounters with polygamy or with puberty rites or even with the way some nations drive their automobiles can be quite a shock to an American visitor. With the shock may go not only disapproval or disgust but a sense of excitement that things can *really* be that different from what they are at home. To some extent, at least, this is the excitement of any first travel abroad. The experience of sociological discovery could be described as "culture shock" minus geographical displacement. In other words, the sociologist travels at home—with shocking results. He is unlikely to find that he is eating a nice old lady for dinner. But the discovery, for instance, that his own church has considerable money invested in the missile industry or that a few blocks from his home there are people who engage in cultic orgies may not be drastically different in emotional impact. Yet we would not want to imply that sociological discoveries are always or even usually outrageous to moral sentiment. Not at all. What they have in common with exploration in distant lands, however, is the sudden illumination of new and unsuspected facets of human existence in society.

People who like to avoid shocking discoveries, who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School, who like the safety of the rules and the maxims of what Alfred Schutz has called the "world-taken-for-granted," should stay away from sociology. People who feel no temptation before closed doors, who have no curiosity about human beings, who are content to admire scenery without wondering about the people who live in those houses on the other side of that river, should probably also stay away from sociology. They will find it unpleasant or, at any rate, unrewarding. People who are interested in human beings only if they can change, convert or reform them should also be warned, for they will find sociology much less useful than they hoped. And people whose interest is mainly in their own conceptual constructions will do just as well to turn to the study of little white mice. Sociology will be satisfying, in the long run, only to those who can think of nothing more entrancing than to watch and to understand things human.

Source: Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., Anchor Books, 1963).