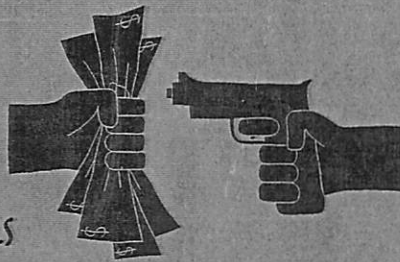
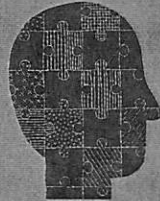




GLOBAL ISSUES,  
LOCAL PERSPECTIVES



SOME COMMIT CRIMES BECAUSE  
THEY ARE RESPONDING TO  
A SOCIAL SITUATION



MODERN  
IDENTITIES  
ARE BEING  
DECENTERED

SCIENCE CAN BE  
USED TO BUILD A  
BETTER WORLD



THE MARRIAGE  
CONTRACT IS A  
WORK CONTRACT

GENDER IS  
AN IMITATION  
FOR WHICH  
THERE IS NO  
ORIGINAL



# THE SOCIOLOGY BOOK

BIG IDEAS SIMPLY EXPLAINED

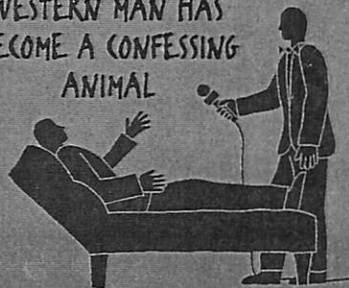


CONSPICUOUS  
CONSUMPTION  
OF VALUABLE  
GOODS IS A  
MEANS OF  
REPUTABILITY  
TO THE  
GENTLEMAN  
OF LEISURE



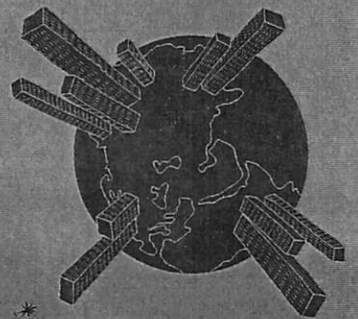
ABANDON ALL  
HOPE OF TOTALITY,  
YOU WHO ENTER  
THE WORLD OF  
FLUID MODERNITY

WESTERN MAN HAS  
BECOME A CONFESSING  
ANIMAL

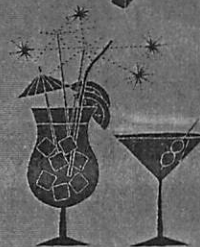


RELIGION IS THE  
SIGN OF THE OPPRESSED  
CREATURE

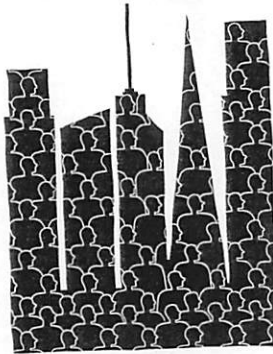
GLOBAL CITIES  
ARE STRATEGIC SITES  
FOR NEW TYPES OF  
OPERATIONS



TECHNOLOGY, LIKE ART,  
IS A SOARING EXERCISE OF  
THE HUMAN IMAGINATION



A  
SENSE  
OF ONE'S  
PLACE



**H**umans are social creatures. Throughout our evolution, from our days of foraging and hunting animals, we have tended to live and work in social groups, which have become progressively larger and more complex. These groups have ranged from simple family units, through clans and tribes, villages and towns, to cities and nation states. Our natural inclination to live and work together has led to the formation of civil societies, which have been shaped by the increasing breadth of our knowledge and sophistication of our technology. In turn, the nature of the society we live in influences our social behavior, affecting virtually every aspect of our lives.

“

Sociology was born of the modern ardor to improve society.

**Albion W. Small**  
US scholar (1854–1926)

”

Sociology is the study of how individuals behave in groups and how their behavior is shaped by these groups. This includes: how groups are formed; the dynamics that animate them; and how these dynamics maintain and alter the group or bring about social change. Today, sociology's scope ranges from the theoretical study of social processes, structures, and systems, to the application of these theories as part of social policy. And, because societies consist of a collection of individual people, there is an inevitable connection between the structures of society as a whole and the behavior of its individual members. Sociologists may therefore focus on the institutions and organization of society, the various social groupings and stratifications within it, or the interactions and experiences of individuals.

Perhaps surprisingly, sociology is a comparatively modern discipline. Although philosophers in ancient China and ancient Greece recognized the existence of civil society and the benefits of social order, their concern was more political than sociological—how society should be organized and governed, rather than a study of society itself. But, just as political

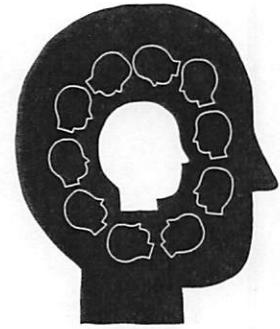
philosophy emerged from these civilizations, sociology appeared as a result of profound changes in Western society during the Age of Enlightenment.

There were several aspects to these changes. Most noticeably, technological advances had provided the machinery that brought about the Industrial Revolution, radically changing methods of production and creating prosperous industrial cities. The traditional certainties based on religious belief were called into question by the philosophy of the Enlightenment. It was not only the authority of the Church that was undermined by this so-called Age of Reason: the old order of monarchies and aristocracies was under threat, with demands for more representative government leading to revolutions in America and France.

### **Society and modernity**

A new, modern society was created from the Age of Enlightenment. Sociology began to emerge at the end of the 18th century as a response to this transformation, as philosophers and thinkers attempted to understand the nature of modernity and its effects on society. Inevitably, some simply





bemoaned the erosion of traditional forms of social cohesion, such as the family ties and community spirit found within small, rural societies, and the shared values and beliefs offered by a common religion. But others recognized that there were new social forces at work, bringing about social change with a potential for both social order and disorder.

In keeping with the spirit of the Enlightenment, these early social thinkers sought to make their study of society objective, and create a scientific discipline that was distinct from philosophy, history, and politics. The natural sciences (physics, chemistry, astronomy, and biology) were well established, and the time was ripe for the study of humans and their behavior.

Because of the nature of the Industrial Revolution and the capitalism that it fostered, the first of the new "social sciences" to emerge was economics, pioneered by Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, better known as *The Wealth of Nations*, in 1776. However, at the same time, the foundations of sociology were also being laid, by philosophers and theorists such as Adam Ferguson and Henri de Saint-Simon, and

in the early part of the following century by Auguste Comte, whose scientific approach to the study of society firmly established sociology as a distinct discipline.

Following in Comte's footsteps came three ground-breaking sociologists, whose different approaches to the analysis and interpretation of social behavior set the agenda for the subject of sociology in the 20th century and beyond: Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. Each identified a different aspect of modernity as the major factor in creating social order, disorder, and change. Marx, a materialist philosopher and economist, focused on the growth

of capitalism and the subsequent class struggle; Durkheim on the division of labor brought about by industrialization; and Weber on the secularization and rationalization of modern society. All three have had an enthusiastic following, influencing sociology's major schools of thought to the present day.

### A social science

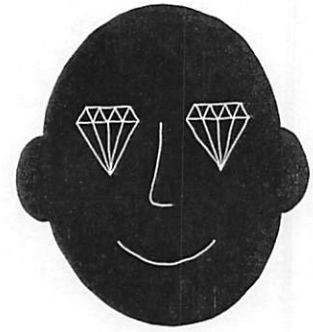
Sociology was a product of the Age of Reason, when science and rational thinking began to reign supreme. Early sociologists were therefore anxious that, for their discipline to be taken seriously, their methods should be seen to be rigorously scientific—no mean feat, given the nature of their subject: human social behavior. Comte laid the ground rules for the new "science" of sociology, based on empirical evidence in the same way as the natural sciences. Marx, too, insisted on approaching the subject scientifically, and Durkheim was perhaps the first to gain acceptance for sociology as a social science in the academic world.

To be scientific, any research method must be quantitative—that is to say, have measurable results. Marx and Durkheim could point to facts, figures, and statistics to back up their theories, but others »

“ Human nature is... unbelievably malleable... responding accurately and contrastingly to contrasting cultural traditions.

**Margaret Mead**

”



maintained that social research should be more qualitative. Weber especially advocated an interpretive approach, examining what it is like to live in modern society, and the social interactions and relationships that are necessary for social cohesion.

Although this viewpoint was initially dismissed by many as unscientific, sociology has become increasingly interpretive in the latter half of the 20th century, with a methodology that includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative research techniques.

### Social reform

For many sociologists, sociology is more than simply the objective study of society, and the quest to analyze and describe social structures and systems. Sociological theories, like theories in the natural sciences, have practical applications, and can be used to improve the society in which we live. In the 19th century, Comte and Marx saw sociology as a way of understanding the workings of society in order to bring about social change. Marx famously said, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it," and his many

followers (sociologists as well as political activists) have taken this to heart.

Durkheim, who was nowhere near as politically radical as Marx, made great efforts to have sociology accepted as an academic discipline. To gain the approval of the authorities, he had to demonstrate not only the subject's scientific credentials, but also its objectivity, especially in light of the political unrest that had existed in Europe for more than a century following the French Revolution. This somewhat "ivory tower" approach, divorced from the real world, dominated sociology for the first part of the 20th century, but as sociologists gradually adopted

a more interpretive stance, they also advocated sociology as a tool of social reform.

This was particularly noticeable among sociologists with a Marxian perspective and others with a left-wing political agenda. After World War II, sociologists, including Charles Wright Mills and Michel Foucault, examined the nature of power in society and its effects on the individual—the ways in which society shapes our lives, rather than the way we shape society, and how we can resist these forces. Even in more mainstream sociology, the mood was changing, and the scope of the subject broadened from the academic study of society as it is, to include practical applications informing public policy and driving social change. In 1972, Howard Becker, a respected US sociological theorist, wrote: "Good sociology... produces meaningful descriptions of organizations and events, valid explanations of how they come about and persist, and realistic proposals for their improvement or removal."

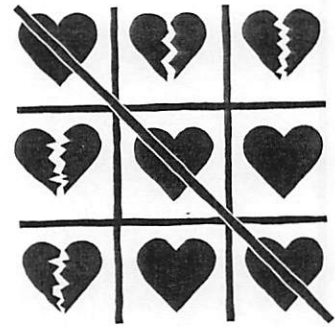
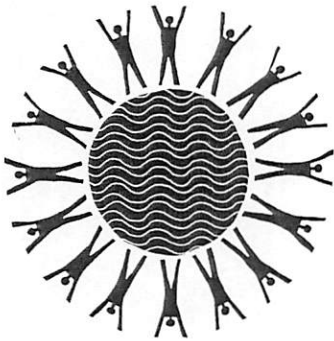
“  
The function of sociology,  
as of every science,  
is to reveal that which  
is hidden.

**Pierre Bourdieu**

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### Institutions and individuals

As a reflection of the increased emphasis on the relevance of sociology, the subject gained greater acceptance, and even



popular interest, in the second half of the 20th century, and as more thinkers turned their attention to social issues, so the scope of sociology broadened. Evolving from the traditional study of the structures and systems of modern society and the forces of social cohesion and causes of social disorder, it began to examine the connections between these areas and the interactions of individuals and social groups.

A century or so ago, sociologists were divided into those who approached the subject on a macro level (looking at society as a whole and the institutions that it is constituted of), and those who approached it on the micro level—focusing on the individual's experience of living within a society. While this distinction still exists to an extent, sociologists now recognize that the two are closely connected and many concentrate their work on groups that fall between these two approaches—social classes; ethnic, religious, or cultural groups; families; or groups that are defined by gender or sexual orientation.

Sociology has also responded to the accelerating pace of change. Since World War II, many social conventions have been challenged,

and new social norms have taken their place. In the Western world, the civil rights and women's movements have done much to address racial and gender inequalities, and sociological theories have also helped change attitudes to sexuality and family life. Here, as Zygmunt Bauman advises, "The task for sociology is to come to the help of the individual. We have to be in service of freedom."

### The global age

Technological innovations have arguably brought about social changes comparable to—or more far-reaching than—those wrought by the Industrial Revolution. Increased automation and computerization, the rise of the service industries, and the growth of consumer society have all contributed to the shape of society many of us live in today. While some sociologists see this as a continuation of the process of modernity, others believe we are now entering a postmodern, post-industrial age.

Advances in communication and mobility have also made the world a smaller place. Sociologists have recently turned their attention to the importance of cultural and

national identity and to the effects of globalization, especially on local communities. With new forms of communication—particularly the Internet and fast international travel—have come entirely new social networks. These do not depend on face-to-face contact, but bring together individuals and groups in ways that were unimaginable even 50 years ago. Modern technology has also provided sociology with a sophisticated means of researching and analyzing the evolution of these new social structures. ■

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The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the workings of institutions that appear to be... both neutral and independent... to criticize and attack them... so that one can fight against them.

**Michel Foucault**

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