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sociology, Science of society, social institutions, and social relationships, and specifically the systematic study of the development, structure, and collective behaviour of organized human groups. It emerged at the end of the 19th century through the work of Emile Durkheim in France, Max Weber and Georg Simmel in Germany, and Robert Park and Alton Smedley in the U.S. Sociologists observe, analyze, describe, and interview, statistics, analysis, controlled experiments, and other methods to study subjects such as the family, ethnic relations, schooling, social status, and social change. In 1907, Roger-Viollet The study of human behavior in social groups is called sociology. This social science tries to describe everything about a society or social subgroup that gives it special characteristics distinct from other groups. The actions of animals are based mainly on instinct. Human behavior, by contrast, seems to be shaped and conditioned by interactions among persons and groups. Sociology therefore includes the study of customs, traditions, patterns of historical development, and institutions that have emerged within specific societies. A social institution is a group organization or custom such as marriage, family, ways of holding property, educational arrangements, government, or legal system. Sociology not only studies whole societies, such as the population of the United States, but also focuses on smaller units. Within any population the smallest social unit is the family. It is therefore possible to develop a sociology of the family within a given society. There are also branches of sociology devoted to studying poverty, religion, the working class, women, immigrants, ethnic groups, teenagers, criminals, and other units. Whatever the unit, a study seeks to describe and explain the behavior of people within the group on the basis of their distinctive customs and their interactions. Sociology looks at how groups of people are similar and how they differ from each other. Since the 1970s, for example, there have been several studies comparing industrial workers in the United States with those in Japan—trying to account for varying levels of productivity, different attitudes toward work, and different relationships to the workplace. Other studies investigate ways in which family structure among immigrants differs from family structure typical of their country of origin. Ever since sociology emerged as a scientific discipline in the late 19th century, its purposes have been disputed. Some scholars maintain that its goal is simply to understand the nature and behavior of social groups. Others contend that the purpose of study is to cause social change—to make sociology an instrument for the improvement of the human condition. The question becomes: Is society descriptive only, or should it also be normative—presenting a standard by which change is to be measured?The methods involve in sociological analysis are some of the same ones used other sciences: Among them are observation, statistical measurement, data collection, experimentation, and the examination of human ecology. The chief problem in all methods is controlling the variables. It is easier to study animals and plants than human beings because plant and animal behaviors can be controlled and monitored—they are predictable. Human behavior in individuals or groups is not predictable—nor can it be easily controlled. Many more variables are found in sociological research than are seen in a chemistry or biology laboratory or field research, is a basic means of collecting information. It means putting oneself within a social group to see how it functions, what its institutions are, and what values it cherishes. Herbert Gans published such a study in 1962. Entitled The Urban Villagers, it was a careful examination of the Italian Americans of Boston's West End.were introduced into sociology from other disciplines quite early and helped establish it as a science. The gathering of statistics proved useful in measuring trends, changes, attitudes, and other characteristics of a society. The use of statistics as a means to analyze society dates back to the 17th century. Edmond Halley, among others, used what was called political arithmetic to create mortality tables. Some analysts used birth- and death rates to ascertain how rapidly the population of London recovered from the effects of the Great Plague of 1665. In France the statesman Jean-Baptiste Colbert ordered the keeping of parish records and of yearly data on marriages, births, and deaths. (See also statistics.)For sociological research is done in a variety of ways, all somewhat unreliable, as allowances must be made for bias. Two common methods of data collection are the interview and the questionnaire. In both cases the questions must be comprehensible to the least-educated persons within the subject population. Questions must be meaningful to individuals of differing backgrounds; they must avoid topics that are likely to arouse resistance or hostility; and they must be precisely worded in order to avoid wide variations in the answers.in social interaction are usually conducted in artificial situations, frequently laboratories and classrooms. Small-group research, such as small-group dynamics sessions or social psychology experiments, are conducted by social psychologist Kurt Lewin and his followers. They are conducted in order to make the people who are really matters—so it was thought—were the rulers, soldiers, and priests who made up society's command structures. Not until the late 18th century did philosophers begin to make a clear distinction between society and its political form. The chief early representative of this shift in emphasis was the French writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau in such books as The Social Contract and Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (see Rousseau, Jean-Jacques).Because Comte coined the term, he is called the father of sociology. He conceived of it as a general social science that—like philosophy—would bring together all knowledge about humanity. It was left to later writers to define sociology as a field distinct from other social sciences. Four of the most influential in doing this were Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Charles Horton Cooley, and Albion Small.If someone other than Comte can be considered the founder of sociology, it is probably Durkheim. He stated that sociology should be a discipline devoted solely to the study of "social facts." These facts include forms of behavior, thought, and feeling and are to be studied as collective characteristics of a society, not as individual manifestations (see Durkheim, Emile).Weber viewed sociology as a science for understanding and interpreting social behavior in order to predict future behavior. He recognized the usefulness of statistics. His research on bureaucracy and social stratification contributed significantly to the ongoing investigation of these subjects (see Weber, Max).Cooley's major contribution was in making human ecology a field of sociology. His definitions of primary group, the looking-glass self, communication, and the relation of society to the individual gave future sociologists much of their conceptual framework.Small, as a professor at the University of Chicago, helped make sociology a distinct academic course and a profession. He introduced European sociological thought into the United States. With George E. Vincent, he wrote An Introduction to the Study of Society (1894), which was the first sociology textbook in the United States.Beginning in the last quarter of the 19th century, sociology quickly established itself in the colleges and universities of the United States. The subject matter of sociology was often combined with other courses—usually history or politics—and the teachers remained mainly social philosophers. The first course actually called sociology was taught at Yale University in 1876 by William Graham Sumner. By 1892 sociology was taught at 18 colleges and universities. In that year Small arrived at the then new University of Chicago and was given the responsibility of establishing a department of sociology—the first such department in the world. Other departments were soon established at Columbia, the universities of Kansas and Michigan; and at Yale and Brown. By the end of the century nearly all colleges and universities had departments, or at least courses, in sociology.The American Journal of Sociology began publication at the University of Chicago in 1895. The school would long remain one of the world's leading centers in the subject. Over the years the strong faculty included George H. Mead, William I. Thomas, and Ellsworth Farris. The American Sociological Society, founded in 1905, was the predecessor of many regional, national, international, and specialized sociological organizations. The International Sociological Association was founded in 1949. (See also social sciences.)Abrams, Philip. Historical Sociology (Cornell Univ. Press, 1983). Chambliss, Rollin. Social Thought: From Hammurabi to Comte (Irvington, 1982). Doob, C.B. Sociology: An Introduction (Harper, 1988). Henslin, J.M. Down to Earth Sociology: Introductory Readings (Free Press, 1988). Larson, C.J. Sociological Theory from the Enlightenment to the Present (General Hall, 1987). Mitchell, D.F. Urban Sociology (Macmillan, 1988). Philosophy & Religion Humanities Society has not achieved triumphs comparable to those of the older and more heavily supported sciences. Several interpretations have been offered to explain the difference—most frequently, that the growth of sociological knowledge is more random than cumulative. Yet, in some parts of the discipline—such as methodology, human ecology, demography, social differentiation and mobility, attitude research, small-group interaction, public opinion, and mass communication—a slow but significant accumulation of organized and tested knowledge has taken hold. By comparison, some other fields lack this expanding volume of literature. Still, the slow development of published sociological research may stem from a variety of factors: excess use of jargon, a yielding to pseudoscientific, excessive imitation of natural science methodology, and overdependence on interview data, questionnaires, or informal observations. Contemporary sociology is indeed marked by all these shortcomings, but in general there has been progress toward clearer communication and improved methodology, both of which yield more reliable data. As a result, conclusions are drawn from research methods applied to replicated studies that are, in turn, less dependent on the strength of one particular methodological device. Bias is sometimes presumed to be a chronic affliction of sociology. This may arise in part from the fact that the subject matter of sociology is familiar and important in everyone's daily life. As a result, variations in philosophical outlook and individual preferences can contribute to an irrational bias. Thus, critics have expressed disapproval of the sociologists' skepticism on various matters of faith, of their amoral relativism concerning customs, of their apparent oversimplifications of some principles, and of their particular fashions in categorization and abstraction. But skepticism toward much of the content of folk knowledge is a characteristic of all science, and relativism can be interpreted as merely an avoidance of antiscientific ethnocentrism. Furthermore, abstraction, categorization, and simplification are necessary to the advancement of knowledge, and no one system satisfies everyone. The dispute about the main purpose of sociology—whether it works to understand behaviour or to cause social change—is a dispute found in every pursuit of scientific knowledge, and such polarization is far from absolute. Scholars differ in the degree to which they regard the value of science as an intellectual understanding of the cosmos or as an instrument for immediate improvement of the human lot. Since even the "purest" scientist conceives of his work as benefiting mankind, the issue narrows to a difference in preference between an ad hoc attack on immediate human problems and a long-run trust that basic knowledge, gathered without reference to present urgencies, is even more valuable. In some countries there is much pressure toward early practicality of results; in others, including the United States, the larger number of scholars and the principal sociological associations have shown preference for "basic science." A degree of polarization has also arisen over the proper strategy for research—whether research should take its direction from the needs of society and humankind or from the evolving theoretical corpus of sociology. In nations that allow academic freedom, such disputes are usually of low intensity, because scholars select research interests on any basis they prefer, including that of personal taste. In this way presumably the motivation of the investigator is maximized. Sociologists most interested in action express impatience at the claims of others who prefer to separate their research from personal values. Much of the dispute prevails only because the two sides argue past each other. There can be wide agreement that no human being is without personal values, that research forced to confirm a particular set of values is not good science, and that there can be scientific issues toward which a particular investigator is value-neutral. In research that is susceptible to contamination by the values of the worker, it is generally possible to minimize the damage by employing methodological devices that prevent the researcher from imposing his or her wishes on a particular outcome. These devices include objective observational techniques, measurement methods, and independent or blind analysis of results. Sociology will continue to grow in the foreseeable future. Among present trends contributing to this growth are the increase in public appreciation of the subject, the continuing growth of funds for teaching and research, the steady reduction of sectarian opposition to study of social institutions, the refinement of methodologies that permit statistical analysis, and the growth of acceptance from scientists in other fields. Although factors such as extreme nationalism and internal conflict can inhibit growth in sociology, such conditions have impeded development only locally and temporarily. Furthermore, it appears likely that public interest in the development of sociological knowledge will increase more people come to realize what sociology can contribute to human safety and welfare. Advances in science and technology will always be accompanied by unforeseen and unintended consequences. Progress can indeed diminish the effects of natural catastrophes such as famine and disease, but progress can also bring about a wide range of new problems. These are not the menaces of an impersonal nature but dangers that arise from imperfection in human behaviour, particularly in organized human relations. In addition, wars have shown a tendency to become larger and ever more destructive, and the causes, though far from being understood, clearly lie, in large measure, in the complexities of social organization, in the interaction of great corporate national bodies. It can be argued that politics, unaided by social science and other disciplines, cannot reverse this trend. Problems within nations are seen as increasing sources of human troubles. There is a general rise in the severity of ethnic hostilities and of internal conflicts between generations, political factions, and other divisions of the populations. Human welfare is also threatened by widespread poverty, crime, vice, political corruption, and breakdowns in the family and in other institutions. Contemporary sociology does not yet provide the solutions, but its practitioners believe that the prospects for human betterment depend in large part on the increasing application of social science knowledge to these enduring problems. Applications of sociology also appear to be spreading in several directions. Many sociologists are employed by national and international bodies to recommend programs, evaluate their progress and effects, gather data for planning, and propose methods for initiating change. Sociologists aid industry by obtaining data on clients and workers. Some of this work includes social surveys, offering advice on personnel or public relations problems, providing labour unions with advice, helping communities undertake reform, counseling families, and donating or selling advice to consumer groups. As long as organizations need information on their various publics, there will be strong demand for sociological knowledge. Progress into the deeper sociological questions will require greater resources, larger research teams, and special research agencies. This compares to the increased complexity of research organization that has been necessary in the natural sciences. In the United States, a Federal Agency for Research in Sociology began undergoing significant development in the 1940s. The mammoth growth of university enrollment and research after World War II was fueled by generous federal and private funding of research. Sociologists sought to enhance their status as scientists by pursuing empirical research and by conducting qualitative analysis of significant social problems. Many universities developed large research organizations that spurred important advances in survey research application, measurement, and social statistics. At the forefront were Columbia University (focusing on cultural surveys) and the University of Chicago (specializing in quantitative analysis of social conditions and detailed studies of urban problems). The struggle over the meaningful use of statistics and theory in research began at this time and remained a continuing debate in the discipline. The gap between empirical research and theory persisted, in part because functionalist theory seemed divorced from the empirical research programs that defined mid-20th-century sociology. Functionalism underwent some modification when sociologist Talcott Parsons enunciated the "functional prerequisites" that any social system must meet in order to survive: developing routinized interpersonal arrangements (structures), defining relations to the external environment, fixing boundaries, and recruiting and controlling members. Along with Robert K. Merton and others, Parsons classified such structures on the basis of their functions. This approach, called structural-functional analysis (and also known as systems theory), was applied so broadly that Marion Levy and Kingsley Davis suggested it was synonymous with the scientific study of social organization. That structural-functional emphasis changed in the 1960s, however, with new challenges to the functionalist notion that a society's survival depended on institutional practices. This belief, along with the notion that the stratification system selected the most talented and meritorious individuals to meet society's needs, was seen by some as a conservative ideology that legitimated the status quo and thereby prevented social reform. It also ignored the potential of the individual within society. In a reaction to the criticism of structuralism, some sociologists proposed a "conflict sociology." In this view, the dominant institutions represent the weaker group as individuals gained prominence in the United States with the social turmoil of the civil rights struggle and the Vietnam War over it. The 1960s and '70s and prompted many younger sociologists to adopt this neo-Marxist view. Their interpretation of class conflict seemed consistent with the principal tenet of general conflict theory: that conflict pervades all of society, including the family, the economy, polity, and education. The early schools of thought each presented a systematic formulation of sociology that implied possession of exclusive truth and that involved a conviction of the need to destroy rival systems. By 1975 the era of growth, optimism, and surface consensus in sociology had come to an end. The functionalist-conflict debate signaled further and permanent divisions in the discipline, and virtually all textbooks presented it as the main theoretical divide, despite Lewis A. Coser's widely known proposition that social conflict, while divisive, also has an integrating and stabilizing effect on society. Conflict is not necessarily negative, argued Coser in The Functions of Social Conflict (1936), because it can ultimately foster social cohesiveness by identifying social problems to be overcome. In the late 1970s, however, attention to other, everyday social processes such as those elaborated by the Chicago School (competition, accommodation, and assimilation) ceased appearing in textbooks. In its extreme form, conflict theory helped revive the critical theory of the Frankfurt School that wholly rejected all sociological theories of the time as proponents of the status quo. These theoretical divisions themselves became institutionalized in the study and practice of sociology, which suggested that debates on approach would likely remain unresolved. One of the consequences of the functionalist-conflict divide, recognized by the 1970s as unbridgeable, was a decline in general theory building. Others were growing specialization and controversy over methodology and approach. Communication between the specialties also diminished, even as ideological disputes and other disagreements persisted within the specialty areas. New academic journals were introduced to meet the needs of the emerging specialties. The field of social anthropology has been historically quite close to sociology. Until about the first quarter of the 20th century, the two subjects were usually combined in one department (especially in Britain), as differentiated mainly by anthropology's emphasis on the sociology of preliterate peoples. Recently, however, this distinction has faded, as social anthropologists have turned their interests toward the study of modern culture. Two other social sciences, political science and economics, developed largely from the practical interests of nations. Increasingly, both fields have recognized the utility of sociological concepts and methods. A comparable synergy has also developed with respect to law, education, and religion and even in such contrasting fields as engineering and architecture. All of these fields can benefit from the study of institutions and social interaction. Though sociology draws on the Western tradition of rational inquiry established by the ancient Greeks, it is specifically the offspring of 18th- and 19th-century philosophy and has been viewed, along with economics and political science, as a reaction against speculative philosophy and folklore. Consequently, sociology separated from moral philosophy to become a specialized discipline. While he is not credited with the founding of the discipline of sociology, French philosopher Auguste Comte is recognized for having coined the term sociology. The founders of sociology spent decades searching for the proper direction of the new discipline. They tried several highly divergent pathways, some driven by methods and contents borrowed from other sciences, others invented by the scholars themselves. To better view the various turns the discipline has taken, the development of sociology may be divided into four periods: the establishment of the discipline from the late 19th century until World War I, interwar consolidation, explosive growth from 1945 to 1975, and the subsequent period of segmentation. Some of the earliest sociologists developed an approach based on Darwinian evolutionary theory, in their attempts to establish a scientifically based academic discipline, a line of creative thinkers, including Herbert Spencer, Benjamin Kidd, Lewis H. Morgan, E.B. Tylor, and L.T. Hobhouse, developed analogies between human society and the biological organism. They introduced sociological theory such as a department of sociology—the first such in the world. Within two years sociology departments had been founded at Columbia, Kansas, and Michigan, and shortly thereafter they were begun at Yale, Brown, and many other universities. 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