



The Origins of Sociology

The Beginnings of Sociology as a Field of Study

Changing Social Conditions

- In the late 18th Century and into the 19th century Western Europe was experiencing fundamental changes in the structure of the society
 - Monarchies on the decline -> Democracies on the increase
 - Agriculture on the decline -> Industry on the increase
 - Increase in Social Liberties
 - Increase in Social Mobility
 - The ability to move up in Social Class

Contextualizing the Origins of Sociology

- 19th Century Western Europe
 - European Society had long been dominated by hereditary Aristocratic families
 - Wealth connected to land ownership
 - Industrialization leading to more access to goods and wealth
 - Growth of large Urban Areas
 - Especially in England



Contextualizing the Origins of Sociology

- New Social Classes emerging
 - For most of human history the majority of humans were living in Agricultural Societies
 - Divisions between Land Owners and Peasants (People who worked the land)
 - Due to industrialization humans were transitioning to Industrial Societies
 - Division between Factory Owners and Laborers



The Scientific Revolution

- Starting in the 17th century developments in Scientific theory and knowledge were changing how humans examined the world
 - At first used to try to explain astronomical observations to explain the Earth's position in the universe
 - Ex. Copernicus theorizing the Sun was the center of our Solar System
 - Late applied science to biological developments
 - Ex. Darwin and the Origin of Species
 - Eventually used to try to explain social order

Early Sociologists: Auguste Comte

- French (1798-1857)
- One of the first scientists to apply the theories of physical science to studying society
- Considered the father of Sociology
 - Coined the term Sociology



Early Sociologists: Harriet Martineau

- British (1802-1876)
- Translated the works of Comte to English
 - Broadened field of Sociological study
- Believed principles of study should be to improve societal conditions



Early Sociologists: Herbert Spencer

- British(1820-1903)
- Built upon theories of Charles Darwin and applied them to the study of Sociology
 - Theory of Social Darwinism
 - Used to try to justify one group over another



Early Sociologists: Emile Durkheim

- French (1858-1917)
- Considered father of modern sociological study
- Empiricist
 - Focused on observable social phenomenon
- Founder of Functionalist Theory



Early Sociologists: Karl Marx

- German (1818-1883)
- Made observations of working class in England
- Divided society between the “haves” and the “have nots”
 - Bourgeoisie—owners of the means of production (capitalists)
 - Proletariat—the workers
- Founder of the Conflict Theory



Early Sociologists: Max Weber

- German (1864-1920)
- Developed theory of Ideal type
 - Model to which everything else could be compared
 - Models used as a way to measure reality
- Founder of Symbolic Interactionist Theory

