**What is Sociology?**

**Quotes about Sociology**

**‘More than a hundred and twenty years ago, Albion Small opined that sociology was born of the modern zeal to make society better. No one has since managed to convincingly refute the correctness of his observation.’**

* Zygmunt Bauman *Collateral Damage: Social Inequalities in a Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011, p. 160).

**‘Sociology originated in the impulse to criticize the principles of the society with which it found itself confronted.’**

* Theodor W. Adorno *Prisms*(trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press 1981, p. 46).

**‘The question of society – its explication, constitution, reproduction and transformation – lies at the core of sociology. The question – what is society? – is probably the first question students confront when commencing the study of sociology.’**

* Anthony Elliott and Bryan S. Turner *On Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012, p. viii).

**‘In keeping with the usual view, the goal of sociology is to uncover the most deeply buried structures of the different social worlds that make up the social universe, as well as the “mechanisms” that tend to ensure their reproduction or transformation.’**

* Pierre Bourdieu *The State Nobility* (trans. Lauretta Clough, Cambridge: Polity, 1996, p. 1).

**Society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand.**

* Karl Marx *The Marx-Engels Reader*(ed. Robert Tucker, New York, W. W. Norton, 1978, p. 247).

**‘Sociology, in particular, has an extraordinary mandate as far as academic disciplines go: to conjure up social life. Conjuring is a particular form of calling up and calling out the forces that make things what they are in order to fix and transform a troubling situation.’**

* Avery F. Gordon *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*(Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 22).

**‘One will no longer be able to consider as unworthy of attention the delicate, invisible threads that are spun from one person to another if one wishes to understand the web of society according to its productive, form-giving forces – this web of which sociology hitherto was largely connected with describing only the final finished pattern of its uppermost phenomenal stratum.’**

* Georg Simmel in D. Frisby and M. Featherstone (eds) *Simmel on Culture* (London: Sage, 1997, p. 120).

**‘Yet I have wondered sometimes whether, for example, we have truly taken seriously that the intricate web of connections that characterizes any event or problem*is the story.’***

* Avery F. Gordon *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997, p. 20).

**‘Sociologists usually start from the idea that there are processes and institutions to be studied over and above the individuals who form them.’**

* Michael Haralambos, Robert van Krieken, Philip Smith and Martin Holborn *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (Australian edition, South Melbourne: Longman, 1996, p.3).

**‘Sociology is the study of us...people...living together. Sociology is the study of the issues, concepts, investigations, and results of individuals living together. While Sociology’s focus is on groups, this focus should not exclude an emphasis on individuals. After all, individuals constitute groups and groups produce individuals. How can we study and fully understand one without the other? Nor can we study them as if they were merely in competition with each other. Rather, as a study of people...by people...Sociology is a personal encounter with the Social Forces which shape our lives, especially those that affect our awareness (and ignorance) of how we create, maintain, and change those very Social Forces’**

* David Kessel,*Sociology Room*, available: <http://www.sociology.org.uk/as4i1g.htm>

**‘Sociology is the most ambitious of all the social sciences. It is concerned with all that happens to people in terms of their relations with each other.’**

* Steve Taylor *Sociology: Issues and Debates* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999, p.1).

**‘In themselves, these materials with which life is filled, the motivations by which it is propelled, are not social. Strictly speaking, neither hunger nor love, neither work nor religiosity, neither technology nor the functions and results of intelligence, are social. They are factors in sociation only when they transform the mere aggregation of isolated individuals into specific forms of being with and for one another – forms that are subsumed under the general concept of interaction.’**

* Georg Simmel *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: The Free Press, 1964, p. 41).

**‘Sociological thinking is a vital help to self-understanding, which in turn can be focused back upon an improved understanding of the social world. Studying sociology should be a liberating experience: sociology enlarges our sympathies and imagination, opens up new perspectives on the sources of our own behaviour, and deepens a sense of cultural settings different from our own.**’

* Anthony Giddens, *Sociology* (2nd edn. Cambridge: Polity, 1993, pp. 1-2).

**‘Sociology lifts the lid on the ordinary and extraordinary, digs around in the hidden meanings and contexts of our lives, and shows that what we take for granted rests on complex and dynamic social processes.’**

* Tony Bilton, Kevin Bonnet, Pip Jones, David Skinner, Michelle Stanworth and Andrew Webster, *Introductory Sociology* (3rd edn. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996, p. 4).

**‘To ask sociological questions, then, presupposes that one is interested in looking some distance beyond the commonly accepted or officially defined goals of human actions. It presupposes a certain awareness that human events have different levels of meaning, some of which are hidden from the consciousness of everyday life. It may even presuppose a measure of suspicion about the way in which human events are officially interpreted by the authorities, be they political, juridical or religious in character.’**

* Peter L. Berger*Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (Harmondsworth: penguin, 1968/1963, p. 41).

**‘The fascination of sociology lies in the fact that its perspective makes us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives. This also constitutes a transformation of consciousness.’**

* Peter L. Berger *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (Harmondsworth: penguin, 1968/1963, pp. 32-3).

**‘But, in fact, facts never speak for themselves: they always have to be interpreted to take on any significance. And interpretation always involves not only theorizing, but empathy and imagination as well – thus one of the catchphrases of our discipline: the sociological imagination.’**

* Gregor McLennan *Story of Sociology: A First Companion to Social Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011, p. 6).

**‘The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise.’**

* C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971/1959, p.12).

**‘As a first and tentative summation, we may say that what sets sociology apart and gives it its distinctive character is the habit of viewing human actions as *elements of wider figurations*: that is, of a non-random assembly of actors locked together in a web of *mutual dependency* (dependency being a state in which the probability that the action will be undertaken and the chance of its success change in relation to what other actors are, or do, or may do).’**

* Zygmunt Bauman *Thinking Sociologically*(Oxford & Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991, p. 7).

**‘Many of the basic theoretical concepts of sociology, despite fundamental variations in their meaning, such as “social structure”, “culture”, “group”, “institution”, and others, embody, indeed formulate, the idea that human actions are situated in complexes of other actions and actors. Sociology takes this feature of human life as something that can be studied, investigated and theorised about, as a significant domain not reduced to the interests of other disciplines.’**

* R.J. Anderson, J.A. Hughes and W.W. Sharrock *The Game: An Introduction to Sociological Reasoning* (London & New York: Longman, 1985, p. 18).

**Thinking Sociologically**

**When thinking sociologically you should think in terms of:**

1. Individual action, subjectivity, meanings
2. Relationships, connections, interactions
3. Structures, systems, forces, dynamics

**Considerations:**

* Consider ability
* Consider class
* Consider age
* Consider gender
* Consider ethnicity
* Consider nationality
* Consider sexuality
* Consider culture/subculture
* Consider context
* Consider the issue of space
* Consider the environment

**Questions**

* Why?
* Who speaks?
* Who do they speak for?
* Who benefits?
* Who loses?
* Who rules?
* Who decides?
* What evidence is presented?
* What are the alternative interpretations of it?
* What evidence might not be presented?
* What is the opposite point of view?
* What is the difference that makes the difference?
* What are the connections?
* What institutions are involved?
* What is being assumed?
* Compare and contrast: how does X do it?
* Have they always done it this way?
* Does this happen formally or informally?
* What causes changes?
* Cause or consequence?
* Failure or product?
* How does individual relate to society?
* How does private relate to public?
* How is this society structured?
* How are resources (material and immaterial) allocated?
* Does X transform society or secure it?
* What are the implications for the future?
* What is the situation that people find themselves in?
* To what extent is it their fault?