

Development of the Science of Sociology — A Historical View

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Abstract – Sociology – a science of recent origin. Sociology as a science and particularly as a separate field of study is of recent origin. According to Prof. MacIver ‘Sociology as a more or less definite body of systematic knowledge with a distinct place and name among the family of sciences must be dated by decades rather than by centuries.’

To be more exact it was in 1839 that Auguste Comte, the French philosopher and sociologist, had coined the term ‘Sociology’ and defined the scope of this social science and the methods which it should employ. Auguste Comte is, for this reason, traditionally considered to be the ‘Father of Sociology.’ He had directed his labours towards determining the nature of human society and the laws and principles underlying its growth and development.

In work Course de philosophic (positive Philosophy) he had clearly pointed out the need for the creation of a distinct science of society which he first called ‘social physics’ and later ‘sociology’ that should concern itself with an analysis and explanation of social phenomena.

Key Words : Social Science, Sociology

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INTRODUCTION

To Comte and to other social thinkers of his day, ignorance about society was the root of all social evil; and he believed that knowledge about society obtained by scientific method then proving so useful in the natural sciences would make possible the development of the good society. He predicted that man would become the master of his social destiny as soon as he had developed a science of society.

The Greeks:

It is true that science of Sociology as we understand it today definitely emerged very late but it does not mean that no attempts were made to explain human relations and behaviour earlier than 1839. As has already been mentioned, attempts to understand social phenomena have been made since earliest times, though they were more of a speculative rather than of scientific nature.

The earliest attempts at systematic thought regarding social life in the West may be said to have begun with the ancient Greek philosophers Plato (427-347 B.C.) and his disciple Aristotle (384-322 B.C.).

Plato's Republic is an analysis of the city community in all its aspects, and in Aristotle's Ethics and Politics we find the first major attempts to deal systematically

with the law, the society and the state. But one defect of Greek approach was that it lacked the concepts of community as distinct from the state, that is, the study of social relationships was dominated by political aspects.

Furthermore, though Aristotle showed more realistic approach to social phenomena than did Plato, who was his teacher, yet their investigations resulted in depicting the character of an ideal social order.

The Romans:

Among the Romans, the most outstanding author is Cicero who in his book De Officiis (On Justice) transmitted to the western world the treasures of Greek learning in philosophy, politics, law and sociology. But the Romans were mainly occupied with giving Europe "The Law and Hence they did not think in terms of non-legalistic aspect of society. They have produced few original social philosophies.

German Sociologists:

The German Sociologists – Von Wiese, Tonnies, Vier Kant, Simmel and Max Weber have also greatly influenced the development of sociology.

The pioneering contributions of Max Weber are his theory of Social Action, concept of Authority, concept of Bureaucracy and concept of Ideal Type. Max Weber regarded sociology as a comprehensive science of social action.

He classified social action into four types according to its mode of orientation, i.e., (i) in terms of rational orientation to a system of discrete individual ends; (ii) in terms of rational orientation to an absolute value; (iii) in terms of affectional orientation and (iv) in terms of tradition.

According to Max Weber, state is the most prominent form of Authority which claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. He classified authority into three types – traditional, rational legal and charismatic.

In his study of Bureaucracy, Max Weber though conscious of its advantages, feels, however, doubtful of its future. He apprehended that in future bureaucracy might become a hard core of Iron Gate.

Sociology—a distinct science:

Sociology has by now been able to establish itself as a distinct science concerned with the scientific study of social phenomena. It has accumulated around itself an impressive array of positive knowledge about social life. The ultimate purpose of Sociology is the deliberate modification of social life.

It is hoped that men armed with knowledge of underlying principles and processes of social life would be better able to mould their societies more nearly to their own desires. Such knowledge would be useful in shaping human affairs. Sociology is sure to progress and develop like other social sciences in due course.

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