

## Introduction to Sociology

The word sociology derives from the *Latin* word *socius*, meaning *companion*, and the *Greek* word *logos*, meaning *study*. Thus, sociology is most literally the study of companionship. The American Sociological Association (ASA) defines sociology as:

“the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior”

The field of sociology formally emerged in the 19th century as a response to major social transformations and intellectual movements that encouraged scholars to understand and systematically study social dynamics. Among the key historical influences were:

- **The enlightenment:** Enlightenment thinkers emphasized reason, science, and skepticism toward traditional authority, which encouraged people to question societal norms and religious explanations for social phenomena. Thinkers like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Voltaire inspired new ideas about individual rights and social contracts, influencing sociological thought.
- **The industrial revolution:** Rapid industrialization and urbanization transformed societies, leading to the growth of cities, shifts in labor, and changes in family structures. These transformations created social problems, such as overcrowding, poor working conditions, and inequality. Scholars began to systematically study these changes to understand how society could adapt to these new conditions.
- **Political revolutions:** The American and French Revolutions introduced ideas of democracy, freedom, and equality. These revolutions challenged traditional power structures and inspired sociologists to explore concepts like social rights, collective action, and power dynamics within societies.
- **Rise of science and rationalism:** The scientific advances of this period, including discoveries in biology, physics, and astronomy, led to a shift from religious to empirical

explanations for natural and social phenomena. This shift provided a model for studying society scientifically, using observation and evidence to understand social behavior.