

European Theorists (part one)

○ **Auguste Comte (1798 – 1857)**

The term sociology was first coined in 1780 by the French essayist Emmanuel-Joseph Sieyès (1748–1836) in an unpublished manuscript. In 1838, the term was reintroduced by Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte originally studied to be an engineer, but later became a pupil of social philosopher Claude Henri de Rouvroy Comte de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). They both thought that social scientists could study society using the same scientific methods utilized in natural sciences. Comte also believed in the potential of social scientists to work toward the betterment of society. He held that once scholars identified the laws that governed society, sociologists could address problems such as poor education and poverty.

Comte named the scientific study of social patterns positivism. He described his philosophy in a series of books called *The Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830–1842) and *A General View of Positivism* (1848). He believed that revealing the laws by which societies and individuals interact would usher in a new “positivist” age of history. While the field and its terminology have grown, sociologists still believe in the positive impact of their work.

○ **Karl Marx (1818 – 1883)**

Karl Marx was a German philosopher and economist. In 1848, he and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) coauthored the *Communist Manifesto*. This book is one of the most influential political manuscripts in history. It also presents Marx’s theory of society, which differed from what Comte proposed. Marx rejected Comte’s positivism. He believed that societies grew and changed as a result of the struggles of different social classes over the means of production. At the time he was developing his theories, the industrial revolution and the rise of capitalism led to great disparities in wealth between the owners of the factories and workers.

Capitalism, an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of goods and the means to produce them, had developed in many nations. Marx predicted that inequalities of capitalism would become so extreme that workers would eventually revolt. This would lead

to the collapse of capitalism, which would be replaced by communism. **Communism** is an economic system under which there is no private or corporate ownership: everything is owned communally and distributed as needed. Marx believed that communism was a more equitable system than capitalism. While his economic predictions did not materialize in the time frame he predicted, Marx's idea that social conflict leads to change in society is still one of the major theories used in modern sociology.