**Basic concept of sociology**

Auguste Comte Th e French philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1 857) coined the term sociology from the Latin socius (“social, being with others”) and the Greek logos (“study of”) to describe a new science that would engage in the study of society. Even though he never actually conducted sociological research, Comte is considered by some to be the “founder of sociology.” Comte’s theory that societies contain social statics (forces for social order and stability) and social dynamics (forces for conflict and change) continues to be used, although not in these exact terms, in contemporary sociology. Drawing heavily on the ideas of his mentor, Count Henri de Saint-Simon, Comte stressed that the methods of the natural sciences should be applied to the objective study of society. Saint-Simon’s primary interest in studying society was social reform, but Comte sought to unlock the secrets of society so that intellectuals like himself could become the new secular (as contrasted with religious) “high priests” of society (Nisbet, 1979). For Comte, the best policies involved order and authority. He envisioned that a new consensus would emerge on social issues and that the new science of sociology would play a significant part in the reorganization of society (Lenzer, 1998). Comte’s philosophy became known as positivism—a belief that the world can best be understood through scientific inquiry. Comte believed that objective, bias-free knowledge was attainable only through the use of science rather than religion. However, scientific knowledge was “relative knowledge,” not absolute and final. Comte’s positivism had two dimensions: (1) methodological— the application of scientific knowledge to both physical and social phenomena—a nd (2) social and political— the use of such knowledge to predict the likely results of different policies so that the best one could be chosen. Th e ideas of Saint-Simon and Comte regarding the objective, scientific study of society is deeply embedded in the discipline of sociology. Of particular importance is Comte’s idea that the nature of human thinking and knowledge passed through several stages

as societies evolved from simple to more complex. Comte described how the idea systems and their corresponding social structural arrangements changed in what he termed the law of the three stages: the theological, metaphysical, and scientific (or positivistic) stages. Comte believed that knowledge began in the theological stage— explanations were based on religion and the supernatural. Next, knowledge moved to the metaphysical stage—explanations were based on abstract philosophical speculation. Finally, knowledge would reach the scientific or positive stage—explanations are based on systematic observation, experimentation, comparison, and historical analysis. Shift s in the forms of knowledge in societies were linked to changes in the structural systems of society. In the theological stage, kinship was the most prominent unit of society; however, in the metaphysical stage, the state became the prominent unit, and control shift ed from small groups to the state, military, and law. In the scientific or positive stage, industry became the prominent structural unit in society, and scientists became the spiritual leaders, replacing in importance the priests and philosophers of the previous stages of knowledge. For Comte, this progression through the three stages constituted the basic law of social dynamics, and, when coupled with the laws of statics (which emphasized social order and stability), the new science of sociology could bring about positive social change.