

Pages 218-232 (Georg Simmel)

A Biographical Sketch

- Born on March 1, 1858 in Berlin, Germany
 - o Father died when he was an infant
 - o Guardian secured Georg's financial future so that he could pursue future intellectual interests.
- Struggled to get a permanent academic position throughout most of his career.
 - o Wrote on large variety of subjects that crossed disciplinary boundaries.
 - Unusual topics in sociology (of smell, of secrecy)
 - o "Real" scholars only looked at small set of questions.
- At the time, German Universities also tainted by anti-semitism.
 - o Simmel encountered discrimination as a Jew.
 - o Rejected from University of Heidelberg as chair of philosophy because he was Jewish, "clever", and his lectures brought in inferior foreigners and women.
- 1885 → Unpaid lecturer at University of Berlin
 - o 1901 → still not given full position
 - o 1914 → finally given full professorship at University of Strasbourg.
- Died 4 years later of liver cancer
- "Marginal Status", but still played significant role in developing sociology
 - o Taught some of the first sociology courses in Germany
 - o Helped found the German Society for Sociology
 - o Published more than 200 articles and 30 books

Intellectual Influences & Core Ideas

- Work spanned across three disciplines: Philosophy, History, and Sociology.
 - o Also went in different directions that were not always related.
 - o Did NOT create a coherent theoretical scheme or a systematic critique.

- Society

- o Saw that society lies in the *interactions* that take place between individuals and groups.
 - Therefore society is not a system of overarching institutions nor an abstract idea used to describe a collection of individuals pursuing their own lines of conduct.
- o “A number of individuals connected by interaction...It is not a ‘substance,’ nothing concrete, but an event: It is the function of receiving and affecting the fate and development of one individual by the other” (221).
 - *Focus on interactions among men
- o Society = array of interactions engaged in by individuals
 - Society is a process of constantly being realized.
 - Society = something individuals do as they influence and are influenced by each other.
- o **Duality** - existence of society presupposes the existence of individuals.
 - Preserving your individuality cannot occur if completely wrapped up in a group membership (because wouldn't have a self to call your own).
 - Self-directed efforts to express/satisfy your desires requires interaction with others.
 - Autonomous Being + Product of Society

- Sociology

- o “The study of social interaction (sociation)”
- o Wanted to analyze **the forms** in which interaction takes place.
 - Understanding specific **content** of interactions that take place between per se an employer + employee (what they talk about and why) is NOT a central concern to sociologists.
 - Sociological - look at uniformities/commonalities that these interactions have with other interactions.

- o Task to uncover the basic forms of interaction that people pursue their interests or satisfy their desires.
- o **Content of Interaction** – drives, purposes, interests, inclinations that individuals have for interacting with another.
 - Actions are identifiable when joined with others.
 - Ex: conflict/cooperation, domination/equality
- o Led him to parallel with geometry and sociology.
 - Both draw from determining regularities that exist between different materials.
- o **Conflict + Sociability**
 - Conflict = inevitable, beneficial feature of social life
 - Resolves tension between contrasts
 - Based on interaction of unity and discord
 - *No society could exist without some measure of conflict.
 - Positive role in developing sense of self + group unity
 - Intensifies group membership by generating a clearer distinction in who does/doesn't belong to a group.
 - o Antagonism promotes cohesion
 - Sociability = “play-form of association”
 - Interacting with others for the sake of the connection itself.
 - Regardless of the seriousness in the subject matter of conversations, sociability finds “its justification, its place, and its purpose only in the functional play of conversation as such.”
 - *Democratic* in nature
 - o Establishes artificial world
 - **Ex: Flirtation (Coquetry)**
 - o Type of erotic playfulness in which an actor continuously alters between consent and denial.