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Sociology **Human Behavior in a** **Group and Societal Context**

Frank J. Zulke

Sociology, defined broadly, is the scientific study of society, social groups, and social behavior. A basic premise is that behavior is determined by the groups to which people belong and by the societies in which they live. In other words, we behave the way we do because we belong to particular groups in a particular society at a particular point in space and time.

Groups can be primary (a small number of people who interact on an intimate basis) or secondary (a small or large number of people who interact on a temporary, anonymous, and impersonal basis). Think of dyads such as two people in love, or larger collectivities such as baseball teams, churches, audiences at a rock concert, or corporations. The kinds of questions that would interest sociologists studying such groups are: How did they form? How are new members brought in? Do they influence members consciously or unconsciously? Is there pressure to conform? Will behavior of members change as the group gets larger? Are there leaders? Are secondary groups becoming more important than primary groups today?

These groups combine together to form societies. Societies can range from small bands of twenty to fifty people who survive by hunting animals and gathering nuts and fruits to highly developed industrial societies teeming with millions of people. While sociologists are interested in both types of societies, they will usually leave the "bands" for the anthropologists to study. The sociologists will concentrate on the modern, complex, technologically advanced societies and attempt to see how the societies meet basic

social needs of their members. Thus they will look at such universal institutions as the family, religion, education, government, and the economy.

As an aside, it might be of interest to note that the development of sociological research and theory has occurred only in countries which have democratic political regimes. (The word sociology itself, in fact, was coined in France by Auguste Comte in the time period immediately following the French Revolution.) This may be changing at present. In 1989, the Presidium of the Communist Party in the U.S.S.R. passed a resolution making the development of sociology a national priority. For the first time in Soviet history, graduate students were sent to the United States to study sociology. Sociology in China has also made dramatic strides. Since the death of Mao Ze-dong, a Chinese Sociological Association was founded and government funds for research were made available. However, events like Tiananmen Square in China (1989) and the societal deterioration activated by the breakup of the Soviet Union (1991) may mean that the future of sociology in those countries is still precarious. A crackdown on well-known scholars like Chinese economist He Qinglian during the early 2000s lends support to the idea that China is not willing to grant even limited press and academic freedom to its social scientists. Critical of what she considers a corrupt Chinese government, He's books have been banned in China and she found herself under full-time surveillance. Fearful of being charged with espionage, He finally sought refuge in the Scholars at Risk program at the University of Chicago.

There are two levels of analysis at which sociologists work. One level is microsociology, which focuses on everyday patterns of behavior, face-to-face interactions and the like. The sociologist here might examine workers on an assembly line, men and women in a singles bar, or college students who join a cult. No aspect of social life is too small for this level of analysis. The second level of analysis is macrosociology, which focuses on relationships between and among groups and the overall social arrangements in society. The sociologist here might explore how subsistence technology is related to the stratification system or the long-term effects of industrialization on a society. Microlevel and macrolevel analysis often complement each other—to ignore either would give a lopsided view of what sociological analysis is about.

Still another way to find out even more about what sociology is would be to check the table of contents of an introductory sociology text. Besides topics already mentioned above, typical topics found here include culture, socialization, race, ethnicity, gender, bureaucracy, crime, delinquency, ecology, stratification, demography, minorities, etc. By now, it should be clear that sociology is a broad field.

In its approach to the study of behavior, groups, and society, sociology strives to be scientific. This means that sociologists are sometimes distrustful of common-sense explanations. (See Box 5.1.) One wag has wryly suggested that common sense is no more than yesterday's opinions. While one could debate if this is true or not, sociologists prefer to use an explanatory approach which can be verified by empirical evidence. They want to

Box 5.1

Sociology versus Common Sense

Since people live in society, they feel they know a lot about what's happening within it. Didn't many believe, not too long ago, that the average female—because of “innate inferiority”—could not do college work as well as the average male? “It's simply common sense,” it was said. But just because many believed it did not “prove” the biological inferiority of women. Because we tend to believe what we want to believe, we sometimes accept as fact that which has not been investigated. Such a common-sense approach to social knowledge can be vague, oversimplified, contradictory, and even illogical. If “he who hesitates is lost,” why should you “look before you leap”? How can “absence make the heart grow fonder” when “out of sight, out of mind”? Do “opposites attract” or do “birds of a feather flock together”?

Common sense may tell us that “early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise,” but the sociologist who did research to examine this would probably tell us that the man in question is most likely to be an unskilled worker who will not live as long as those in higher occupational groups, who barely earns enough money to feed his family nutritiously, and who is functionally illiterate. Because common sense may lead to distortions, misinterpretations, and falsehood, sociologists approach their subject matter scientifically. A true understanding of how social life operates must be based on facts. Note well: this is not saying that common sense is necessarily wrong. It is saying that it can't always be verified by empirical evidence.

Source: Glenn Vernon: *Human Interaction* (New York: Ronald, 1965).

use an objective, logical, and systematic method to collect, organize, and analyze their information. It is this use of the “scientific method” that separates sociological thought from casual reflection. In terms of specific research designs, it is estimated that 90 percent of the data collected by sociologists is done by means of interviews and questionnaires.

In his classic *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), the late C. Wright Mills suggests that sociologists have a special insight into the social world because they have the ability to understand the subtle linkage between personal experience and the structure of the society as a whole. Mills feels that people have problems seeing beyond their immediate situation. They see themselves and their world from the limited perspective of family, friends, classmates, and fellow workers. People have no idea how they are connected to larger groups and the general society. Mills feels that use of the sociological imagination opens up this cramped vision of

the world because it makes people aware that personal lives are shaped by larger historical and social forces which are sometimes beyond personal control. In simplest terms, the sociological imagination shows how individuals fit into the “big picture.”

Mills offers examples dealing with unemployment and divorce. When only one man is unemployed, he says, that is his personal trouble. His problem can be explained by lack of skills, opportunities, or willingness to work. When ten million American workers are jobless, however, that is a social problem which goes beyond the failings of individuals. Either the economy is not producing enough job opportunities or the educational system is not turning out enough qualified workers or some other impersonal social force is at work. Or consider the general rise in divorce rates in American society today. A couple may be unhappily married, but when one out of two American marriages end in divorce, it is time to look beyond a particular couple’s personal troubles. The sociological imagination suggests the causes of divorce must be understood in terms of social developments that have made married life less satisfactory. It guides us to think about “subjective” reasons such as feminism, an increasing emphasis on “self-fulfillment” and a decline in common values as well as more “objective” reasons such as increased job openings and higher salaries for women. We will not be able to understand ourselves or the world, Mills says, without understanding the groups to which we belong and the society in which we live.

In another classic work, *Invitation to Sociology* (1963), Peter Berger pursues Mills’ idea and suggests that the sociological imagination becomes like a “demon that possesses one.” It will induce skepticism about “common sense” explanations of human society and allow us to see through façades and conventional wisdoms. It will make us see ourselves and others in a new light. Even the social world into which we were born and in which we have lived all our lives may appear different.

To test if what Mills and Berger say is correct you might wish to discuss with your instructor whether the statements in Box 5.2 are true or false. All deal with areas of research that sociology has investigated. While answers are listed at the end of the chapter, don’t look them up until you have “tested” yourself.

Another question to be considered is “what can this stuff be used for?” While sociology is a *basic* science dedicated to the accumulation of fundamental knowledge about society, groups, and behavior, it is also an *applied* science. Sociology can be used to solve practical problems, guide policy decisions, or serve particular clients. In fact, many of the 15,000 professional sociologists in America are quite active in the applied area. This is true for the 70 percent who teach in colleges and universities and for the steadily increasing 30 percent who are employed in government, industry and nonprofit organizations. Sociologists involved in applied research collect, analyze, and interpret data that enable manufacturers to anticipate consumer preferences, candidates to

Box 5.3

Jane Addams and W. E. B. Du Bois

While some social scientists have combined the role of sociologist with that of social reformer, few did it as successfully as sociological pioneers Jane Addams (1860–1935) and W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963). Jane Addams founded Hull House, a settlement house which provided community services for immigrant families, in Chicago in 1890. She was from a privileged background and trained in social work. She did systematic research on social problems and worked tirelessly to improve conditions of the poor, the sick, and the aged. Her efforts on behalf of immigrants were outstanding. Sociologists from the nearby University of Chicago were frequent visitors; they gathered at Hull House to discuss women's suffrage, the peace movement, and urban problems of the day. In 1931 she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her leadership in the women's international peace movement.

William Edward Burgharot Du Bois (pronounced "do boys") was a poor African American who attended Harvard University, where he earned the first doctorate awarded by that university to a person of color. His lifetime research interest was relations between African Americans and whites in the United States. At first content to collect data, analyze it, and publish books on this subject, he became frustrated about racial inequality and served as a founding father of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). When advancement did not occur quickly enough, he finally became a revolutionary Marxist. He was so disenchanted with race relations in America, he finally moved to Ghana at age 93, where he is buried.

Why do you think the important work of Addams and Du Bois has been kept at the "margins" of sociology and has only recently been given much attention?

both are interested in past events. It is similar to geography to the extent that both examine how the physical environment affects people's lives.

Differences are important to consider as well. Unlike psychologists who may look for explanations of adjustment in internal mental processes and individual differences, sociologists seek answers in societal and group contexts. Unlike anthropologists, sociologists focus on industrialized rather than on preindustrialized societies. Unlike political scientists and economists, sociologists focus on more than one institution. Unlike historians, sociologists are concerned with present-day events. Finally, unlike geographers, sociologists attend to the interactions between social institutions and natural resources.

Box 5.2

A True-False Quiz on Sociological Research

1. The population explosion in newly developing countries of the world is caused by their high birth rates.
2. The rate of murder will be lower in states that have capital punishment.
3. Reading pornography increases the likelihood of committing sex offenses.
4. Young people are more likely to vote than people over 65.
5. A person is more likely to be murdered by a stranger than a family member.
6. People on welfare could work if they wanted to.
7. The income gap between male and female workers has narrowed significantly.
8. Men engaging in public homosexual acts tend to be single rather than married.
9. Most frequently, rape involves strangers.
10. Most old people end up in nursing homes or other institutions.

predict voting behavior, companies to make personnel decisions, and courts to render informed and just decisions. One landmark court decision was made, for example, in *Brown v. Board of Education* in Topeka, Kansas, in 1954. Topeka had segregated schools at that time. Six-year-old Linda Brown was forced to travel 20 blocks to an all-black school rather than attend an all-white school in her neighborhood. Her father challenged this and brought the case before the Supreme Court. Using the research and testimony of sociologists and other social scientists as the basis for its decision, the Supreme Court stipulated that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional because of harmful effects on the potential educational achievements of African-American children. I hope this point is made: sociological theory and research have important implications for changing social policies and programs. Box 5.3 looks at two important social reformers.

In closing, it might be useful to consider some similarities between sociology and the other social sciences. Sociology is like psychology in that both are concerned with how people adjust to both predictable and unforeseen occurrences. It is similar to anthropology for both study culture. It is like political science as both are interested in how people govern themselves. It is like economics in that both disciplines try to analyze how resources are allocated to meet people's needs. It is like history in that

As is probably obvious, the boundaries between sociology and the other social sciences are vague and constantly shifting. Sociologists recognize this overlap and feel free to invade the territory of other social scientists whenever it feels useful. After all is said and done, sociology and the social sciences all study human behavior and the settings in which it occurs.

Questions

1. Define sociology. How does it differ from socialism or social work?
2. What types of groups and societies is the sociologist interested in? Why?
3. Why is sociology most highly developed in countries that are democracies?
4. What is the difference between microsociology and macrosociology?
5. Why might a common-sense approach to social knowledge lead to distortions and misinterpretations?
6. In what sense is sociological thought different from casual reflection?
7. What is the “sociological imagination”? How might use of it add to our understanding of such controversial issues as affirmative action or bilingual education?
8. Were you surprised by the answers to the ten questions taken from current sociological research? Why or why not?
9. “What can this stuff be used for?”
10. Can you see any disadvantages to using social science research as evidence for legal decisions?
11. How is sociology different from, and similar to, the other social sciences? Apply the approach of each to juvenile delinquency.
12. Why are Jane Addams and W. E. B. Du Bois considered to be “marginal” sociologists? Could gender and race have something to do with this?
13. Sociology departments in graduate schools currently attract more women than men. Why do you think this is so?
14. C. Wright Mills supposedly said that a good sociology course would teach one how to read the *New York Times* properly. Check out a story at <http://www.nytimes.com/> or the Web site for your local newspaper. Does having read this chapter give you a different perspective on the story?
15. Check out the American Sociological Association’s Web site at <http://www.asanet.org> to discover further information about sociologists and the wide variety of topics they study.

Answers for “a true-false quiz on sociological research” are all false.

6

Anthropology Evolution and Culture

Frank J. Zulke

Anthropology is often defined as the study of the human race. It includes everything that has to do with human beings, past and present. Since, needless to say, no single anthropologist would be able to investigate such a broad field, the discipline is divided into at least two subfields: physical anthropology and cultural anthropology.

Physical anthropology focuses on humans as biological organisms. Whether the emphasis is on extinct ancestors or the study of living primate groups (mammals including lemurs, apes, monkeys, etc.), the attempt is made to examine the evidence for human evolution. The human animal is seen as evolving through gradual processes of "natural selection," for example, developing upright posture, a large complex brain, and finely tuned eye-hand coordination. The time span of interest here, as Box 6.1 indicates, may go back as far as four and one-half billion years ago to the birth of the world. The time span of interest for humans, as traced through fossils, will be less. Fossils are bones, impressions, or traces of animals or plants of a former geological age found in the earth's crust. They provide clues to the human past. Fossils of humans have been found that are 35,000 years old. Other fossils that show "links" to humans have been dated at 500,000 and even millions of years old. Anthropologists, thus, have been the caretakers of human history for a very long period of time. Remember, too, that there are "written" records for only about 5,000 years of human existence.

Although humans are biological organisms and, therefore, similar to other animals, humans are also quite unlike any other animals. One dis-

Box 6.1

Origins

"If we were to document the history of the earth, day by day, year by year, since its birth as part of the solar system some 4 1/2 billion years ago in a single volume exactly 1,000 pages, each of those pages would cover 4 1/2 million years. Almost the first 1/4 of the book, about 220 pages, would describe how conditions propitious for the emergence of life slowly came about after the gases had condensed to form our hot seething planet. At this point, blobs of jelly, unmistakably living, yet very primitive, would be seen in the swirling tide pools of the warm oceans. But life in the sea in a form with which we are familiar would have to wait until we plowed our way through 3/4 of the text—the Age of Fishes was 500 million years ago. And the first land creatures, descendants of fishes that deserted their aquatic habitat turn up 30 pages later, at about 350 million years ago. One of the most exotic periods, and certainly the most awe-inspiring, of the earth's history, the Age of Dinosaurs, would consist of about 30 pages describing the period between 225 million and 70 million years before the present when with unusual abruptness, they disappeared to be replaced by the Age of Mammals. It was at this point, 70 million years ago, that the first primates evolved, small rat-like creatures that abandoned ground living and took to life in the trees; it was from such simple beginnings that monkeys, apes and humans evolved.

The most distant of man's identifiable ancestors (the first hominid) put in an appearance about 3 pages from the end of the book, at 12 million years. The *Homo* lineage comes at the bottom of the penultimate page, and the first stone tools would be described half way down the last page. And, testing our powers of literary compression to an extreme degree, the whole rise of modern humans would have to be crammed into the last line of the book, with the esthetics and symbolism of the stone-age cave paintings, the advent of agriculture, the intellectual excitement of the Renaissance, the turbulence of the Industrial Revolution, the polarization of the Superpowers, the birth of space travel and everything else that constitutes our recent history somehow telescoped into the final word."

Source: Richard Leakey and Roger Lewin, *Origins* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1982), pp. 12–14.

tinative feature that makes humans different is that they possess culture—socially learned and shared patterns of behavior passed on from one generation to another. Without a culture transmitted from the past, each new generation would have to solve again elementary problems of existence.

Each generation would have to rediscover fire, reinvent the wheel, relearn to domesticate animals, devise again a moral code, etc. Cultural anthropologists study humans in terms of their culture. Three areas of interest for cultural anthropologists are archeology, linguistics, and ethnography.

Archeologists study past cultures. They are interested in those which left written records as well as those that existed thousands of years ago that did not. To study these cultures, anthropologists look at material objects, or artifacts, that people have left behind. Often these remains are buried in the ground, so archeologists carefully dig them up, date them, and try to reconstruct what life was like in the past. Tools, weapons, pottery, and even "garbage" can tell much about how people lived. Think of what archeologists 500 years in the future might conclude if they were to find a copper disk we Americans call a "penny." Or what if they found a condom?

Linguists study human languages. They are not so much interested in learning to speak foreign languages fluently but in understanding how the language used affects a culture. Without language, culture could not exist. It allows knowledge to be passed from individual to individual and from generation to generation. Some go so far as to say we know the world only in terms that language provides. We can tell how important something is to a culture, for example, by the number of words the culture has for it. Consider that Eskimos have twenty different words for snow, Bedouin Arabs have hundreds of words related to the care of camels, and Americans have an ever increasing number of words related to the computer. Also, linguistic relations reveal links between people previously not recognized as related. For example, people in Finland and Hungary speak different languages, but both are part of the Finno-Ugric language family, revealing that at one time they were one people.

Ethnographers concentrate on cultures of the present. They often go into the "field" to complete an observational study firsthand. Sometimes they use detached observation but more often they use participant observation. Here they eat, sleep, work, and make friends with the people in the culture they are studying. You may want to revisit Chapter 3, pp. 23-26 for a more detailed description of participant observation. Anthropologists use this research design much more than other social scientists, and when they do, they may experience "culture shock." (See Box 6.2.)

Although best noted for studying relatively small, isolated, nonliterate, faraway, "exotic" cultures—the last surviving stone age tribe, lost cities—anthropologists are increasingly interested in large, complex, technologically developed cultures. At least two reasons may account for this. First, many traditional cultures are disappearing or else are finding it necessary to adjust to a rapidly changing world. Second, there is greater recognition that some questions that must be dealt with in modern cultures can only be answered by the kind of understanding that comes from the use of an anthropological perspective.

The anthropological perspective constantly reminds us that ours is not the only existing culture and that we should not be ethnocentric, i.e., we should not consider our way of life superior to all others. If we judge

Box 6.2

Culture Shock

Culture shock refers to the feelings of disorientation and stress that people experience when they enter an unfamiliar cultural setting. Even anthropologists have this experience. Napoleon Chagnon describes his first meeting with members of the Yanomamo tribe of Venezuela and Brazil.

My heart began to pound as we approached the village and heard the buzz of activity within the circular compound. . . . The excitement of meeting my first Indians was almost unbearable as I duck-waddled through the low passage of the village clearing.

I looked up and gasped when I saw a dozen burly, filthy hideous men staring at us down the shafts of their drawn arrows. Immense wads of green tobacco were stuck between their lower teeth and lips making them look even more hideous, and strands of dark-green slime dripped or hung from their noses. We arrived at the village while the men were blowing a hallucinogenic drug up their noses. One of the side effects of the drug is a runny nose. The mucus is always saturated with the green powder and the Indians usually let it run freely from their nostrils. My next discovery was that there were a dozen or so vicious, underfed dogs snapping at my legs, circling me as if I were going to be their next meal. I just stood there holding my notebook, helpless and pathetic. Then the stench of the decaying vegetation and filth struck me and I almost got sick. I was horrified. What sort of a welcome was this for the person who came here to live with you and learn your way of life, to become friends with you?

I am not ashamed to admit . . . that had there been a diplomatic way out, I would have ended my fieldwork then and there.

Source: Napoleon Chagnon, *Yanomamo: The Fierce People* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 5.

other life styles in terms of our own conceptions, we may see those who are different as inferior, ignorant, crazy, or immoral. "Early anthropologists" in the guise of Christian missionaries, for example, were appalled at the sexual habits of Polynesian peoples.

An important step in reducing ethnocentrism is to understand that values, norms, beliefs, and attitudes are not in themselves correct or incorrect, desirable or undesirable. They simply exist within the total cultural framework of a people. This is why anthropologists tend to be "holistic" in their examination of various cultures. Everything should be considered in relation to how it fits into "that" culture rather than how it fails to fit into "our" culture. This is known as cultural relativism. By attempting to

understand how lending one's wife to strangers fit into traditional Eskimo culture, for example, you would discover its usefulness in that climate. Below, the quotation from Hans Ruesch's *Top of the World* has an Eskimo explaining to a non-Eskimo why wife lending makes sense: "Anybody would much rather lend out his wife than something else. Lend out your sled and you'll get it back cracked, lend out your saw and some teeth will be missing, lend out your dogs and they'll come home crawling, tired—but no matter how often you lend out your wife she'll always stay like new." Wife lending seems the reasonable thing to do—albeit a sexist solution to be sure—within the harsh climate of the Eskimo culture.

In advocating cultural relativism, anthropologists are not suggesting that we can or even should condone everything people in other societies do. One does not, for example, have to lend one's wife to a stranger. Practicing cultural relativity does not mean the abandonment of our own moral standards, but rather the attempt to understand the standards of other cultures. We can learn a great deal from the study of other cultures, no matter how simple or complex. The more we learn, the more we eventually see that it is impossible to gain complete knowledge about ourselves without examining cultures other than our own.

There are about 7,000 professional anthropologists in America, many of whom are women. About 80 percent of them are college professors who do research in addition to teaching. The other 20 percent work and conduct research for government, private industry, or nonprofit organizations such as museums. Anthropologists are particularly useful in jobs which require a cross-cultural orientation and/or where there is work that requires humanistic social planning.

In closing, I leave you to ponder this anecdote. My social science professor in college asked students to choose which of the social sciences was the "best." It had to be anthropology, she said, because anthropologists were the only social scientists with a sense of humor!

Questions

1. What is anthropology? Why is it considered the broadest science?
2. Distinguish between physical and cultural anthropology.
3. How long have humans been on earth? How do we know?
4. Distinguish between archeology, linguistics, and ethnography.
5. What conclusions might an archeologist come to if she found a penny or a condom while digging in the U.S.A. 500 years from now? What might she find if she were to come across a gravesite?
6. Can language be racist, sexist, and/or ageist? Give examples.
7. Napoleon Chagnon, quoted in Box 6.2, is one of the most celebrated anthropologists of his generation. Type his name into your favorite search engine and find out more about his background.

8. Chagnon's *Yanomamö: The Fierce People* is cited by many as the best ethnography ever written. Yet the book is mired in controversy and Chagnon has been called a racist for his pronouncements about Yanomamö violence. Type "Life among the Anthros" into a search engine and pursue this controversy in a 2/8/01 *New York Review of Books* article by Clifford Geertz. Evaluate whether Chagnon deserves any of this criticism or if his critics are unfairly challenging him.
9. What is culture shock? What might someone coming to the U.S.A. for the first time find shocking about American culture?
10. Why do anthropologists usually focus on small, isolated societies?
11. What is ethnocentrism? Why should we avoid it?
12. Is cultural relativism desirable? Why or why not?
13. The American Anthropological Association is the world's largest professional organization for anthropologists. Visit its Web site at <http://www.aaanet.org> to find information about jobs/careers, publications, research interests, and ethical concerns of anthropology.
14. Can you think of any reasons why anthropologists might have a better developed sense of humor than other social scientists?

7

Political Science The Study of Governing

Brady Twiggs

Political science is the study of the process of governing. As such, it is highly varied. Unlike most of the other social sciences, there are widely divergent positions among its practitioners as to exact subject matter and proper methodology.

Certain historic developments can help us understand why such diversity exists. Humankind has, after all, evolved an almost unending variety of ways to enable some humans to exercise rule over others. Partially, this involves institutional variations such as: clans, tribes, city-states, empires, kingdoms, nation-states and leagues—each of these having many possible sub-types. There have also been differences in the instrumentalities of rule: physical force, divinity, consensus, wealth, wisdom, prestige, numbers and negotiations. Finally, variation has developed in terms of what aspects of human activities are a part of political life. At times, only a limited number of human actions have been viewed as proper subjects of rulership, and yet, at other times, no area of human activities is excluded (care of the aged or unemployed, etc.).

To accompany such variation in subject matter, there have evolved widely divergent conceptions as to the best way to seek understanding. Among the intellectual approaches to the study of political life, the concepts, methods, and tools of such fields as theology, philosophy, law, psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, history and biology are employed.

In the light of such diversity it is perhaps understandable that any attempt to specify “the” subject matter and “the” method of studying the subject is bound to frustrate and lead to arguments among practitioners.

Despite this, it is possible to state some common subject concerns that consistently appear in the works of political scientists. First, political activity is always directed toward something, whether it be the good, salvation, equality, freedom, security, power or material well-being. Much of political thinking is devoted to identifying, defining, questioning, measuring and judging these values or purposes as a part of political life.

Other subjects for political scientists are institutions or structures. Political activities are organized human activities even though humans can and do participate as individuals. Here, the concern is with such phenomena as assemblies, parliaments, presidencies, bureaucracies, courts and police, political parties and pressure groups. Indeed, almost any form of human organization has the potential to function politically and thus come under the scrutiny of political study.

Finally, political life involves humans behaving or doing things. Some human actions that have been the focus of political studies are: warfare, voting, bargaining, terrorizing and administering. Again, almost any human activity can involve political life and part of political study is devoted to discovering and explaining what actions are necessary to understanding.

It is possible to identify philosophical, behavioral, and policy approaches to the study of political life. (Box 7.1 illustrates how the approaches might view abortion.) At times, one of these approaches is more dominant than the others, but all of them are currently represented among today's political scientists. Philosophical questions raised involve the moral nature of political behavior: What should be the relations among differing human groups? What are the limits of demands for obedience? What are the rights of individuals and groups? In trying to explore such issues the tools of philosophy are employed and this area is referred to as political philosophy (or political theory).

Secondly, we find an approach classified as the behavioral method. This includes a wide range of specific approaches. Generally, however, the emphasis is in developing and using concepts, tools and theories of science. The search is for patterns and systems of behavior. The tools used in such studies tend to be adapted from sociology, economics and psychology.

Finally, we have what can be called the policy approach. This approach arose from a concern with the effects of political activities and interest in trying to solve some of society's problems. These studies start with certain generally accepted values and attempt to see how the political process furthers their achievement and/or how it can be formulated to do so. Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of this methodological approach is the concern with the process of decision-making: who makes decisions; why they make them; and what are the results.

In conclusion, political science is one of the broadest studies of those who are students of human existence. As such, its scope of subject is almost as wide as all of human life and it makes use of almost every variety of intellectual skill.

Box 7.1

Abortion

The controversy surrounding the issue of abortion may be viewed as an illustration of the differing approaches to the study of political phenomena. Below are the differing ways the controversy might be viewed.

Political Philosophy

The problem is one of conflict of values (freedom of choice versus protecting the unborn) and the role of government in this conflict.

1. What are the moral foundations of the respective values?
2. Should government attempt to resolve such value conflicts?
3. If so, upon what basis?
4. Can government effectively impose a settlement and retain the support necessary to popular government?

Political Behaviorism

The problem is one of political conflict in which the government has become involved.

1. What groups are identified with each position?
2. What is the legislative record of abortion-related bills?
3. What is the state of public opinion?
4. What are the positions on the issue of the candidates for political office?

Policy Approach

Government decisions are going to strengthen or injure either the achieving of the freedom of choice or safeguarding the rights of the unborn.

1. What do the statistics on abortion suggest is needed? (How many; trends; related deaths; age and socioeconomic groups involved; etc.)
2. How has the Supreme Court decision impacted on the abortion statistics?
3. What would result from a change in the current legal status of abortion?
4. What public policies should be pursued to (change or sustain) the current situation?

Questions

1. What is political science? What are some common "subject concerns" of political scientists?

2. What does it mean to say that "At times, only a limited number of human actions have been viewed as proper subjects of rulership, and yet, at other times, no area of human activities is excluded?"
3. What is the difference between philosophical, behavioral, and policy approaches to the study of abortion?
4. What might each of the above approaches have to say about "prayer in school" in America?
5. Political science, both historically and in the present, has attracted more male than female faculty, graduate students, and practitioners. Why do you think this is so?
6. The American Political Science Association is the major professional organization for individuals engaged in the study of politics and government. Peruse its home page at <http://www.apsanet.org> to learn about publications, job prospects, and research interests of political scientists.
7. If you are interested in political events as they happen, the sites for the U.S. Senate (<http://www.senate.gov>), U.S. House of Representatives (<http://www.house.gov>), and the White House (<http://whitehouse.gov>) will be invaluable.

8

Economics **Limited Resources and** **Unlimited Needs**

Zalmay Gulzad

“Economics is about money and why it is good.”—Woody Allen

People and countries all over the globe make decisions every day that affect their resources. Economics is a social science that studies how people and societies allocate their limited resources to satisfy unlimited wants and needs. The economy is the institutional structure through which individuals in a society coordinate their diverse wants or desires. Given the limited amount of resources, how do people make choices among the available options to satisfy their needs? In fact, this problem of limited resources and unlimited wants is a continuous problem that everyone deals with throughout life and is generally described as the “economic problem.” Hence, economics is the study of the economy.

The discipline of economics is divided into two categories known as macroeconomics and microeconomics. Macroeconomics is the study of aggregate economic behavior. Macroeconomists look at an entire industry or even how an entire nation’s economy operates. For example, if wages were to increase across the entire economy, there would be a huge, widespread impact on all economic behavior. In fact, when all wages go up, the effect on overall demand is too large to ignore—and we will have to apply various theories of macroeconomics in order to understand it. Macroeconomists look at factors like the gross domestic product (GDP), recessions,

interest rates, and unemployment figures. The economic reports you see in the *Leader*, *USA Today*, and the *New York Times* are often macro-oriented.

Microeconomics, on the other hand, is the study of the economic behavior of individual decision-making units (individuals, individual households, individual firms) or a particular market. Microeconomists are concerned with questions about how individuals and firms decide what to purchase and what to produce. For example, in microeconomics one might examine the effects of an increase in the price of apples. If we apply the law of demand, it will show us that—all other things remaining the same—the quantity of apples that people purchase will go down when the price goes up. We can introduce the concept of price elasticity of demand and attempt to measure how large or small an effect the price increase will have on the quantity of apples purchased.

In the current economy wages of computer programmers have increased. This increase typically causes employers to find means to get by with fewer hours of that type of labor. When we just look at the increased wages of computer programmers, the impact of their extra earnings on the demand for goods and services will be minimal, since they make up a small sector of the labor force. The predictions or study of focused economic behavior, such as the changes in demand for apples or for computer programmers, is part of microeconomics. In short, microeconomics is the economics of one thing at a time while macroeconomics is the economics of everything at once. The *Wall Street Journal* is a good resource for discussions of micro- and macro-level issues.

Returning to the aspect of economics that deals with the problem of limited resources and unlimited wants as applied to individuals and soci-

Box 8.1

Glossary of Important Economic Terms

Barter—The direct exchange of goods without money.

Wages—The payment that a resource owner receives for labor used.

Monopoly—A sole producer of a product for which there are no close substitutes. A food store and a gas station in a small town away from the neighboring cities have complete control over the business because there are no other competitors.

Capitalism—An economic system in which resources and the means of production (Bank-Firm-Factory) and services are owned privately. The three principles of capitalism are private ownership, personal profit, and competition.

Socialism and Communism—An economic system in which all the members of society are equal and where everyone owns everything. There is no private ownership and all the means of production are owned by the people (state).

ety as a whole, can you think of any individual or society that is completely satisfied? Even the United States, one of the wealthiest societies in the world, would prefer to have better health care, higher quality education, less unemployment, a cleaner environment, and the list goes on. But there are not enough resources available to satisfy all of these unlimited wants despite what politicians tell you during election season.

Some of the unlimited wants and needs are caused by factors like the following: products eventually wear out and need to be replaced; people constantly want something different and tire of what they already possess; and new or improved products are continuously available. Typically, the wants and needs of people and societies are associated with the consumption of goods and services. Goods and services, known as commodities, are produced by using resources such as land, labor, capital, and enterprise. "Land" includes all natural resources: the land itself, as well as any minerals, oil deposits, timber, or water that exists on or below the ground. This category is sometimes described as including only the "free gifts of nature," namely those resources that exist independent of human action. "Labor" consists of the physical and intellectual services provided by human beings. The resource called "capital" consists of the machinery and equipment used to produce output. However, the use of the term "capital" differs from the everyday use of this term. Stocks, bonds, and other financial assets are not "capital" as economists use the term. "Enterprise," or entrepreneurial ability, refers to the ability to organize production and bear risks.

Economists argue that the fundamental economic problem is scarcity. Since there are not enough resources available to satisfy everyone's wants, individuals and societies have to choose among alternative economic systems. The three types of economic systems that have been adopted by countries to tackle their economic problems are: market economies, command economies, and mixed economies.

A market or capitalist economy is one in which resources are allocated by prices without government intervention. The United States economy is an example of this model, where companies decide to make the type and quantity of goods in response to consumer demand. An increase in the price of one good encourages producers to switch resources into the production of that commodity. Consumers decide the type and quantity of goods to be bought. If there is a decrease in the price of one good, then consumers switch to buying the cheaper product. Of course, people who are wealthier can buy more goods and services than the poor.

A command or socialist economy is one in which government planning is predominant. The government owns most of the resources and decides which type and what quantity of goods will be produced. The former Soviet Union is an example of this type of economy. The government plans the production target for each commodity and allocates the necessary resources. Because incomes in this system are more equally distributed, people generally can afford the goods and services produced.

Box 8.2**Globalization**

The term “globalization” is heard at least once a day in the news and used in people’s conversations. Some people are strong supporters of economic globalization and others are out protesting against it. The exact meaning of globalization and its consequences have become the subject of open debate. The number of economic theories that have emerged in examining globalization cannot be matched in any social science.

From a theoretical perspective globalization is a process of the denationalization of markets, politics, and legal systems, which leads to a global economy. The three key driving forces for this globalization process are: falling trade barriers; cheaper transportation costs; and falling communication costs. Ideally this new market, with its revolutionized information technology, causes borders to disappear and helps to bring people from around the world closer together.

While globalization has generated rapid economic growth, it has not done so uniformly. We see an unequal division of labor in different regions of the globe. For example, if many Americans begin to consume less coffee, then the sale of coffee decreases. Many coffee shops will close. As a result, people will become unemployed. However, for countries like Colombia, whose principal export is coffee, the impact will be devastating and will be felt immediately by the entire nation.

The key players in this global economy are the transnational corporations who easily establish themselves in foreign markets because of, among other factors, the surplus of cheap labor in developing countries. In India, the local soft drink company, which employs many people and is a vital component of the Indian economy, will find it difficult to compete with Coke or Pepsi. When Pepsi or Coke enters the Indian market, they will produce their soft drink with cheap labor and easily sell it at competitive prices. The consequences are that people become attracted to the better packaging, quality, and marketing strategies of this western product. Pepsi and Coke will drive the local soft drink company into bankruptcy. Once Coke or Pepsi gains the monopoly, the price is gradually raised, negatively impacting the consumer in the long haul. Similarly, the local economy does not benefit from the profits derived by the transnational company, and the indigenous upper class is ruined. In fact, “sweat shops” emerge as businesses from the United States or Europe use the labor forces in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Paying their employees low wages, they produce and sell their products at high prices in western countries, earning high profits. Thus, critics of globalization point out that in the global economy there is uneven development. Developing countries become consumers of products and the developed western countries gain all the profits.

A mixed economy is one in which privately owned firms produce most goods while the government provides essential services like education and health care. India and most European countries have a mixed economy.

Questions

1. What is the study of economics?
2. What is macroeconomics? Find a newspaper article that mentions some of the factors considered in macroeconomics.
3. What is microeconomics? Find a newspaper article that reports about an issue in microeconomics.
4. What types of resources are involved in producing goods and services?
5. Contrast the different types of economies. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
6. Will a market or capitalist type of economy necessarily lead to more democracy?
7. Will workers be better off in a capitalist economy or a socialist economy? See http://www.amersol.edu.pe/_sramos/socialist for a further comparison of the two types of economies.
8. What is globalization?
9. How can globalization detrimentally impact the economies in developing countries?
10. In Chapter 55, Clarke writes that Michael Jordan's annual pay to lend his name to Nike shoes was at one time greater than the combined wages of all the women in Indonesia who actually made the shoes. Would this chapter predict such an occurrence?
11. Surf the Web site provided by the American Economic Association (<http://www.aeaweb.org>) to learn about journals, job prospects, and research interests in economics.

9

History The Study of the Past

George Christakes

History is a subject that most American college students have studied from elementary school through high school and on to the college or university level. While there are varying descriptions of the discipline, there is generally agreement that history is the study and interpretation of the past. The widespread emphasis on history throughout American education brings up several questions. Why do people study history? What does history study? Is it always accurate and do various historians always agree? Is it a science or is it an art? Why is history important for understanding current events? This essay will give brief answers to these types of questions.

Why Do People Study History?

Box 9.1 offers an account of one individual who almost lost his life because he was caught up in a major historical event—the persecution of Jews during World War II. This life-threatening experience began an enduring fascination with history for that person.

Other historians besides Kren have been drawn to study history by a desire to understand major events or situations that impacted their own lives. Even the first historian, Herodotus, was attracted by a major event of his lifetime—the Persian War of the fifth century B.C.E.¹, a war that could have resulted in the destruction of the Greek society in which he lived. He wrote not only about the two direct participants in the war, the Greeks and Persians, but also about the various groups that surrounded them and preceded them. A few years later a younger contemporary of Herodotus named Thucy-

Box 9.1

One Historian's Traumatic Introduction to his Life's Work

In 1938 a 12-year-old boy and his sister embarked on a frightening adventure because they were caught up in the events of history. The boy, George Kren, and his 9-year-old sister Joanne were the children of a Jewish doctor from Austria and the grandchildren of a doctor who had treated Adolf Hitler's mother for cancer. 1938 was the year of the *Anschluss*, or annexation of Hitler's native Austria by the Nazis. Young George and Joanne fled to England, leaving their parents behind. A year later they went on to the United States via a frightening Atlantic Ocean crossing threatened by German submarines. The entire family was fortunate to be successfully reunited in New York City. A few years later the eighteen-year-old George Kren returned to Europe as a member of the U.S. army. He landed in France a few days after the invasion of Europe in June of 1944 and fought through to the end of the war, when he saw one of the concentration camps in which his fellow Jews had been murdered.

It is not surprising that these experiences during his youth left Kren with a fascination about the events that he had witnessed and participated in. After the war he went to college in Maine and then on to the University of Wisconsin where he obtained a Ph.D. in history working under George Mosse, another refugee from the Nazis. Intellectuals like Mosse and Kren wanted to understand about events and societies, how they worked and how they came to be the way they are or were. Hitler, the Nazis, and the holocaust were subjects that riveted Kren's attention and he consequently devoted his professional life to studying the Nazis in order to understand the events that had happened—both for himself and his readers.

dides described the subsequent Peloponnesian War, in which he had participated as a general. Almost 2500 years ago these two ancient Greeks, reacting to the events of their lifetimes, began the discipline of history, which would record and interpret the past and hopefully would shed light on the present.

Modern American historians, including Oscar Handlin, John Hope Franklin, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., also have studied and written about subjects that affected or impacted them in their early lives. Handlin, who grew up in multiethnic New York City, has concentrated his studies on the immigrant experience. John Hope Franklin experienced many frustrations as a young Black man in a segregated America but nevertheless persevered and became a historian, obtaining his Ph.D. from Harvard. Interest-

occasion even dare to hope that a student will become either an amateur or professional historian.

Realistically the instructor also must recognize that in our contemporary colleges and universities some students study history (and other subjects) not because of interest but simply because it is a required course in a particular curriculum or is offered during a convenient time slot. Some of these students, perhaps to their own wonder, will find history absorbing and a wonderful tool to give one perspective on both the past and present. Others will not. Unfortunately, in today's America students often have attitudes about history shaped by anti-intellectual popular culture, which dismisses the past as something dead and worthless. Interestingly, popular culture has now become a domain of historians who will no doubt study this anti-intellectual attitude in the contemporary media.

The Topics of History

Historians write about widely different subjects from the past. Many think of history as only studying past politics and wars because during their elementary and secondary education, wars and politics were the only aspects of history discussed at any length. However, war and politics do not comprise all of history. Since World War II, specialists in American history have written more about such topics as the American histories of ethnicity, religion, ideas, women, Black Americans, Native Americans, and popular culture. World history topics also have broadened from the traditional concentration on Europe and the Mediterranean area to now include histories of Latin America, Russia, Africa, Asia, and the rest of the world. Within these geographic areas the topics have included politics, war, and colonialism but, as in American history, also have extended into the study of ethnic, gender, and cultural history. While this trend to broaden historical topics beyond politics and war and into more geographical and cultural areas has been greatly emphasized since World War II, it would be remiss not to note that Herodotus, two and a half millennia ago, discussed a wide range of topics including gender, ethnicity, and cultural systems.

However, dismissing political and military history as old-fashioned and unnecessary poses the danger of creating a distorted portrait of the past. At times historians, teachers, and students have concentrated so much on non-political and non-military topics that they have neglected major historical events and the importance of these events to their non-traditional topics. To understand the importance of politics and war consider the impact upon American women, Blacks, and Jews if Hitler had won World War II or if Islam had conquered Europe during the Middle Ages. The lives and histories of the various peoples in subsequent societies would have been vastly different. Or take a more recent example of a U.S. history topic—the impact of increased need for labor in industry during World War II, which brought women into the work force with the conse-

ingly, Franklin studied and wrote about the Reconstruction Period following the Civil War, which first witnessed many of the patterns that Black Americans would experience in the post-slavery period. He also wrote the groundbreaking and comprehensive history of Blacks in the U.S. entitled *From Slavery to Freedom*. Schlesinger's coming of age occurred during the period of the Great Depression and Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. As a graduate student at Harvard Schlesinger sought the roots of the liberal mentality of the New Deal in the early-nineteenth-century presidency of Andrew Jackson—his study resulted in the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *The Age of Jackson*. Later he wrote about John F. Kennedy, whose liberalism in turn can be considered a legacy of F.D.R. and the New Deal.

While the above examples demonstrate why some historians were drawn to their subjects, such early experiences account for only a part of particular historians' interests. Choices of subjects can fluctuate as much as the personalities, opportunities, and interests of the individuals who become historians. Box 9.2 illustrates the path of one historian to a particular subject.

People frequently are motivated to study history by desires to learn and understand about the United States, their ancestors' country, or the world. Others are interested in understanding about ethnicity, gender, or politics. As students take introductory courses and read history some find topics that excite them and they read even further; some write term papers about these newfound interests. Perhaps their instructors can on

Box 9.2

A Personal Example

My interest in Albion W. Small came about because of a series of events while in graduate school, where I studied under the direction of George Kren. I had an interest in ethnicity in America. The graduate school required one outside area and most history graduate students selected political science or geography, which promised immediate value to the history student. Sociology, which among other topics studied ethnicity, however, seemed more useful to me so I selected that discipline as my outside area. One of the sociology courses I enrolled in concerned social theory and required students to write a paper on a major sociologist of the student's choice. Being a history student, it is not surprising that I chose a sociologist from the earlier period of that discipline's brief history. Writing the paper led me to an interest in learning about the background or history of the sociologist who I had selected and to his ideas, which were largely obtained from his study with and knowledge of German social theorists. A number of years later this interest led me to writing both a dissertation and a book on that American sociologist—Albion W. Small.

quential side effect of an increase in the divorce rate because of women's newfound economic self-sufficiency. To understand this development in American women's history one must have knowledge of broader American history including the social consequences of World War II. Awareness of the relationships between smaller parts of a society and the larger society as a whole is a valuable aspect of the study of history.

The existence of historical hot topics or fads has increasingly influenced history and its teaching. The various decades since World War II have seen the United States focus on subjects and national concerns such as the Cold War, civil rights, the war in Vietnam (with consequent new attitudes and lifestyles of young people), new gender roles and attitudes, reemergence of interest in Native Americans, Watergate, Iran and Iraq, and the Christian right. Various social scientists, including sociologists, political scientists, and psychologists, have written at length on these popular topics, as have journalists. Not surprisingly, so have historians. Historians' works scrutinize the origins of social movements and how society continually develops and changes. With time, what had been new becomes the old and faded.

An awareness of history makes one conscious that those national interests that so quickly recede into the background with the passage of time can often arise again after the passing of still more time. For example, the national interest in conservationism during the first two decades of the twentieth century faded with the reemergence of business and businessmen as heroes in the 1920s. Conservation was subsequently renamed environmentalism and the movement and consequent writing about the subject again emerged at the end of the twentieth century. Now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, environmentalism once again seems in danger of decline with the reemergence of a strong business-oriented conservative movement creating a scenario reminiscent of that during the presidency of

Box 9.3

History Is Bunk

"History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a hinker's damn is the history we make today."—Henry Ford, 1916, *Chicago Tribune*

Ironically, Ford is often misquoted as saying "history is bunk." The pioneer automaker is remembered by historians not only for his role in introducing affordable automobiles but also for his racist beliefs and his support of Adolf Hitler, including sponsoring an American edition of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

Warren G. Harding. Or consider the nation's attention to the plight of Black Americans during the 1860s and the 1960s with a subsequent refocus to other subjects in both cases. Those familiar with history are not surprised at such changes.

Historical Accuracy

While Ford's position that "history is more or less bunk" can be considered extreme, history does vary considerably in accuracy (Box 9.3). Often the variance is not about facts but about the interpretation of events. Historians usually agree about the facts surrounding the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. It occurred on Sunday, December 7, 1941, and a certain number of men and ships were lost. We know who the American and Japanese commanders were. These types of facts are seldom disputed. Where strong disagreements occur is over interpretation of the historical event. Such questions as whether the American naval commander was derelict in his duties, whether American racism led to a underestimation of Japanese military capabilities, or whether the president knew about the attack ahead of time and suppressed the news as a way of forcing the United States into the Second World War are all matters debated by historians, journalists, and the general public to this day. Much in the same manner disagreements occur over other historical events including the Holocaust, Martin Luther's role as the founder of Protestantism, Luther's racism, American suppression of Native Americans, and the American Civil War.

Many of these disagreements are honest differences of interpretation; others are divergent but reasonable views brought about by personal or political beliefs. Still other conflicting interpretations are simply poorly done history or even intentionally distorted and untruthful renditions of history. For example, the denials of the Holocaust during the last decade are indefensible if not incredible. Without even going into all the evidence concerning the Holocaust (including extensive records and films produced by the German SS and captured by the Allied armies at the end of the war), the fact that so many American soldiers who are still alive personally witnessed parts of the Holocaust makes the denials almost ludicrous. Members of certain political, ethnic, and other groups also at times try to bend historical accounts in order to justify to their particular positions or enhance their group's image regardless of the truth. Unfortunately, professional historians have at times also been guilty of writing such questionable history. More positively, many more cases can be cited that demonstrate the integrity of professional historians, who still have written accurate and fair history in spite of their personal involvement with a particular group. John Hope Franklin, discussed earlier, is an excellent example of a historian who produced an accurate, unbiased history about his own people. Box 9.4 offers some ideas about finding and identifying good, unbiased historical accounts.

Box 9.4**How to Distinguish Good from Bad History**

A helpful guide is to read reviews of a book (and/or books by the author) in the reputable historical journals. Librarians can serve as guides to such journals. Do not be caught in the error of assuming that because a book or an article has a lot of pages and footnotes that it is good history. Some authors try and make their works appear scholarly by having a great number of footnotes. These footnotes can be inaccurate, cite works that do not support what has been claimed, or can cite other dubious authors. While good history is well documented with notes showing the author's sources—these notes or citations must be accurate and professional. Remember that in all fields, including history, just because something is printed does not make it true.

History—Art or Science?

The question of whether history is an art or a science is one that not only has advocates on each side but also those that argue that it is both. To begin to understand this seemingly confusing situation let us look at how it developed—i.e., its history. Over three quarters of a century ago Harry Elmer Barnes, in a book entitled *New History and the Social Sciences*, envisioned historians as social scientists that provide studies and data of and from the past. Sociologists, psychologists, economists, and other social scientists could use this collected data to perform experiments to test social science theories. Science and mathematics had become prominent in the late nineteenth century with the work of Darwin and the popularity of scientific and mathematical topics, including statistics and physics. Social science, in its infancy, wanted to achieve similar respectability. It stressed reliance on and utilization of the scientific method and mathematics (particularly statistics).

The question of whether history was a social science or an art had arisen before Barnes' attempt to fit the discipline into his grand scheme. By the end of the nineteenth century the world of knowledge in American universities had been structured into departments of particular subjects or disciplines with the departments themselves combined together into groups such as the humanities, physical sciences, and social sciences. History was classified as a social science, especially by schools following the lead of Columbia University and the University of Chicago, as Barnes had envisioned and championed following World War I. Other schools classified history as an art, grouped alongside disciplines like the classics, literature, and philosophy. Colleges and universities vary in their classification of history as an art or science to this day.

Individual practitioners of history also differ in their opinions of where history should be classified and as to how much they utilize the techniques of the social sciences. For instance, some use mathematical statistics, the insights gained from psychology, or some of the theories of sociologists. Other historians either find social science techniques of little value in their particular area of history or find such techniques generally questionable. Read Box 9.5 to consider whether and to what extent history can make predictions.

Why Is History Important for Understanding Current Events?

Focusing on history as a way of achieving understanding and perspective concerning both the past and the present helps enable us to understand

Box 9.5

The Ability to Predict

Skepticism often arises about whether the social sciences truly can be considered sciences in the sense of the physical or biological sciences, which can predict future events without fail. For instance, political scientists who used statistical sampling techniques are cited for failure to successfully predict the results of the 1948 presidential election. Using this information, the *Chicago Tribune* announced that "Dewey wins by a landslide," which to the newspaper's chagrin was not the result. Instead, Harry Truman was elected president. Recent events in the 2000 election seem to show that social scientists have not perfected their predictions of presidential election outcomes.

History is no better in predicting with absolute certainty than social science. Yes, history can predict the future in general and in very inexact terms. For example, knowing the past record of American public opinion about a particular topic such as gun control, public education, or abortion would allow a person to suggest that Americans are likely to react in a particular way if those topics became a topic of debate in particular areas of the country or among groups of specific educational, religious, or social-class backgrounds. Note how much more vague and less exact such predictions are compared to the physicist being able to predict with certainty the length of time that it will take an object to hit the ground from a given height. Many historians, noting the differences in exactitude as compared to physical scientists, argue that their subject area is an art and distance themselves from claims of being a social science. They argue that history should simply study the past and avoid making claims that it has the ability to make scientifically accurate predictions.

daily newsevents on more than a superficial level. For example, when we hear of problems like the recent events in the Balkans, we must have some historical knowledge of how the various factions came into existence, the factions' past interactions, and the origins of the hatreds that have developed over hundreds of years. It is impossible to really have much understanding, or other than a superficial opinion, about the current events in the area without appreciation of the historical background. Or looking at an example closer to home, the historian can explore the complex problems of the Native Americans. The historian would look at the many threads that helped reduce the Native Americans to their current state. One of the threads the historian would discover is how the nineteenth-century Dawes Act tried to remake the Native American into a family farmer like the white man. Continuing examination of the thread in the twentieth century would reveal that the Eisenhower and Reagan administrations again tried to force the Native Americans into a familiar white pattern by relocating many Native Americans to urban areas and attempting to turn them into factory workers. All of these well-meaning efforts resulted in disaster for the Native Americans they were supposed to help because of a lack of understanding of Native American culture. History, in the cases of the Balkans, the Native Americans, and other current news topics, can provide the key to a deeper understanding of the present.

Finally, one last reason to study history—intellectual curiosity. Sometimes for one motive or another a person's curiosity is aroused. Consequently the person wishes to find out more about a particular topic. This writer suggests a good start to find out about most topics is to read about its history as a beginning approach to achieve understanding. You may even find this reading of history enjoyable as well as helpful. Consider it.

Endnote

¹The designation B.C.E. for *before common era* and A.C.E. for *after common era* are now replacing the older Christian-oriented B.C. and A.D. This is in response to the fact that much of the world is not Christian.

Questions

1. What is history?
2. Why do you think "interpretation" is a part of history?
3. In your opinion, should history be included in the American college curriculum? Should it be required?
4. Some people study history in order to understand experiences in their lives. How did this apply to historians George Kren, Herodotus, Thucydides, Oscar Handlin, John Hope Franklin, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.? (Choose any 2.)
5. How do you react to the ideas that history is dead, worthless, or even "bunk"?

6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of including political and military topics as historical areas of study?
7. Christakes says "what had been new becomes the old and faded." Can you think of something that is of current interest that in five years might become "old and faded"?
8. This article indicates historical interests such as environmentalism and the plight of Black Americans come and go. Can you think of other examples?
9. Does history vary in accuracy? Have you read history that you believe is inaccurate or, at least, inadequate?
10. Go to the library and find a reputable historical journal that contains a review of a book on some historical topic. Identify the name of the journal, the issue, and the date it was published. Identify the title and author(s) or editor(s) of the book, the publisher, and the year published. Write a synopsis of the review.
11. Why is history sometimes placed in the humanities division and sometimes placed in the social science division? How is history classified in your school?
12. Can historians make predictions? Why or why not?
13. Why is history important for understanding current events? Is there something going on currently that you think would benefit from an understanding of history?
14. The American Historical Association's Web site (<http://www.theaha.org>) is an excellent source of information for just about any topic in history. The Smithsonian Institution's Web site (<http://www.si.edu>) holds 140 million artifacts and specimens for the increase and diffusion of historical knowledge. Check it out.

10

Geography The Discipline with a Persistent Spatial Perspective

John A. Alwin

Even though many Americans only now are beginning to appreciate the importance of geography, its roots in the Western world are deep, reaching back to ancient Greece. Such scholars as Homer, Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle knew the importance of geographical knowledge and understanding and discussed geography in their writings. In fact, it was Eratosthenes (c. 273 to c. 192 B.C.), the Greek scholar who spent his career in Alexandria, Egypt, who coined the term "geography," Greek for "description of the earth." Two thousand years later a contemporary definition of geography as "the study of the earth as the home of people" is surprisingly like the original.

A Spatial Perspective

Unlike most other social sciences, geography is more defined by its approach than by what it studies. Geography is the social science with the persistent spatial perspective. Geographical inquiries commonly share three basic, organizing questions: Where? Why there? and What is the significance?

Inquiries routinely begin with gathering data and establishing the patterns and distributions of the phenomena studied. This might be the locational aspects of subjects as varied as AIDS, wheat production, crime statistics, or movement of international trade. Maps, which so graphically show spatial distributions, answer the first question: "Where?" They are understandably the discipline's most powerful tool.

Once patterns are identified, the geographer then poses the second question of "Why" that pattern or distribution "there?" In searching for answers, geographers aren't shy when it comes to considering a wide range of causal factors. With detective-like sleuthing, they consider contributing factors as diverse as soil types, history, climate, ethnic background, environmental perception, and religion. Patterns rarely can be explained by a single factor. More commonly, it is an understanding of the interplay of multiple causes that adds explanation to observed patterns. For example, a study of the geography of America's Midwest Corn Belt might consider climate, soils, topography, transportation, and international economics.

Increasingly, more socially and environmentally conscious geographers continue on in their studies to ask the third and often most important question, "What is the significance" of this geography? A geographer may ask, for example, what implications a changing pattern of farming in a developing country has for local diet, or query the implications of a rapid spread of suburbanization for groundwater quality.

A Threefold Division

Geography is a wide-ranging and diverse social science, and it is useful to think of the discipline in terms of its three major subfields: human geography; physical geography, and geographic techniques.

We *Homo sapiens* are spatial creatures, and the way that we organize ourselves and our activities on the surface of the earth generates the patterns and distributions that so intrigue human geographers. Practitioners in the subfield of human geography have similar interests with other social scientists, studying many of the same topics. Always, however, they bring a distinctive spatial perspective to their inquiries into human behavior. For example, an economic geographer interested in spatial aspects of economic behavior may map a city's retail trade area, determine the distributional aspects of wheat production in the American Great Plains, or map the global pattern of international air travel.

Physical geographers are interested in the natural world in which humankind makes its home, primarily the earth's surface and the lower section of the atmosphere. These geographers share many interests with their kin in the natural sciences. As always, they bring a spatial perspective to their studies. The physical geography subfields of climatology, geomorphology, and biogeography offer examples. Climatologists have a special interest in classification of climates and their distributions and implications for human occupancy. Geomorphologists are intrigued by the earth's landforms and how they vary from place to place. Biogeographers study the distributional aspects of plant and animal life.

Geographers specializing in geographical techniques range from cartographers who construct maps, to experts in interpretation of aerial pho-

tographs, to remote sensing specialists who can decipher and interpret images of the earth's surface generated by satellites. In fact, computers have revolutionized geographical techniques. Pen and ink drawings of maps are now passé, with computer cartography the standard. GIS (geographic information systems) has been an especially fast growing and useful computer-related specialty in geography (see Box 10.1).

Themes Old and New

Since the time of their Greek predecessors, geographers have had a fascination with places and regions, large and small, near and far. Geographers hope to understand what gives places distinctiveness, how they function, and how they interact with other places.

Individuals applying to become one of the several thousand members of the Association of American Geographers are asked to indicate up to three regional specializations on their application form. They can choose from dozens of "official" regional specialties—Europe, Canadian Prairie Provinces, East Asia, Caribbean, and Pacific Rim to mention just a few.

Box 10.1

GIS (Geographic Information Systems)

One of the geographer's most powerful tools is GIS (geographic information systems), which is an integrated computer system for the input, storage, analysis, and display of spatial information. Rather than laboriously overlaying a series of standard paper maps to consider numerous geographic patterns and their interrelationships, GIS allows geographers and others to produce composite and graphic color maps on a computer screen.

A geographer hired to help a corporation locate a new downhill ski area might call upon GIS to make the job easier and quicker. Provided the right spatial information has been stored, the geographer can direct the computer to locate and highlight all locations that meet all the prescribed site attributes within a given area. These may include a minimum elevation, snowfall, slope, northern exposure, location within a prescribed distance of power and of a paved road, and any other relevant variables.

Although its innately spatial nature makes GIS a logical specialty for geography, this computer tool has seemingly unlimited uses both in and out of geography. It has, for example, been used to trace agricultural pollution, to track the endangered snow leopard, to site hospitals for the most cost-effective health care, and to monitor Singapore's microclimate.

During their careers, geographers work to better understand their regions and travel to those places for research when possible.

At least since the time of Hippocrates, the fifth century B.C. Greek physician whose *On Airs, Waters, and Places* introduced the notion of a possible link between human character and the natural environment, geographers have sought to understand the connection between people and the natural world. In North America, George Perkins Marsh's 1864 book entitled *Man and Nature, or Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action*, awoke Americans to the adverse environmental impact of human actions and launched our national conservation movement. Today geographers still routinely engage in studies that bridge human and physical geography (see Box 10.2) and continue to be leaders in the areas of environmental degradation, land-use planning and natural resource studies. A growing global awareness of the serious implications of people's impact on natural systems should provide many challenging opportunities.

Like the other social sciences, geography has become more quantitative and theoretical since the 1960s. A growing contingent of geographers now are fully engaged in searching for regularity and predictability in human spatial behavior. Geographers find it difficult, however, to repeat experiments in controlled laboratory environments. To compensate for this, more theoretical geographers have developed numerous graphic

Box 10.2

The Cultural Landscape

As soon as people move in and occupy a previously unsettled area, they set about converting the natural landscape into a cultural landscape. This is especially true of more technologically advanced cultures which subdivide the land; build highways, bridges, houses, fences, golf courses, airports, and factories; and plant agricultural fields. Each people-induced modification to the natural landscape is an element in the mosaic that is the region's cultural landscape.

From the air, cultural landscapes are all the more apparent. Checkerboard fields, road networks, strip cropping, irrigated green fields, forest clearcuts, towns, and cities all provide silent testimony to humankind's power to remake natural landscapes into cultural landscapes.

The patterns and processes associated with cultural landscapes are of special interest to geographers, many of whom become experts in reading the cultural landscape. Noted Pennsylvania State University geographer Peirce Lewis has described the cultural landscape as a people's unwitting autobiography. Among other things, the cultural landscape conveys information about a society's history, means of livelihood, level of technology, and relationship with nature.

models that simplify spatial aspects of reality and allow them to test causal factors. Models help lead to theories relating to everything from the land-use patterns of cities in Southeast Asia and Latin America to the development of transportation networks in less developed countries.

Unfortunately, most Americans view geography as a grade-school-like discipline dominated by place-name geography, i.e., knowing the names and locations of countries, cities, rivers, and mountains. Those who go on to study geography at the college level quickly learn that such place knowledge is the most mundane aspect of the field. It merely provides a spatial skeleton around which geographers build much more interesting and more relevant geographies that have direct bearing on humankind's well-being.

In our increasingly more interconnected global village, geographers are in a unique position to help us understand new neighborhoods and neighbors. Such knowledge is essential for residents of our shrinking world.

Questions

1. Some of the most interesting kinds of maps are those we carry in our heads, what geographers call mental maps. Without consulting an atlas draw a map of the world on a blank sheet of paper. Show major land areas; locate and label any 30 countries. Draw in the equator and add a map scale. Is your mental map sufficiently developed for an educated resident of our increasingly more interconnected global community?
2. How might a geographer's spatial perspective assist with helping to deal with such current global issues as rapid population growth? Destruction of tropical forests? Loss of biodiversity?
3. What is a current social issue/conflict in your city/neighborhood? How could a geographer assist in resolving this problem?
4. What is a current environmental issue/conflict in your city/neighborhood? How could a geographer assist in resolving this problem?
5. Explain how GIS might assist you in deciding where to locate a new fast-food restaurant in your community.
6. Write a brief essay describing the cultural landscape of your neighborhood or community. How do you think that landscape differs from a counterpart landscape in sub-Saharan Africa? Why the differences?
7. Visit the Web site of the 6500-member Association of American Geographers (<http://www.aag.org>) for information about AAG publications, career prospects, and research projects.
8. This site of the U.S. Geological Survey (<http://www.usgs.gov/>) offers a wide array of information and resources relevant to geography.