

# Humanistic Sociology

Subjects: **Sociology**

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Humanistic sociology is an approach within sociology that emphasizes the human experience, values, agency, and meaning in social interactions. It critiques positivist sociology for being overly deterministic and quantitative, instead advocating for a sociology that is subjective, interpretive, and engaged with moral and ethical concerns. Humanistic sociology is influenced by phenomenology, existentialism, and symbolic interactionism, and it seeks to understand society from the perspective of individuals, emphasizing lived experiences, emotions, creativity, and human potential.

Humanistic Sociology

Subjectivity in Sociology

Interpretive Sociology

Value-Oriented Sociology

## 1. Introduction

Humanistic sociology is an approach that places human experience, emotions, and agency at the center of sociological inquiry. It challenges the scientific, quantitative, and structuralist methods that dominated sociology in the 19th and 20th centuries, instead advocating for a qualitative, interpretive, and meaning-centered approach to studying society <sup>[1]</sup>. Humanistic sociologists argue that sociology should not merely observe and analyze human behavior but also engage with moral and ethical issues, actively seeking to improve human conditions <sup>[2]</sup>.

This approach is deeply influenced by existentialist and phenomenological philosophy, which emphasizes individual experience, consciousness, and meaning-making. It also draws on symbolic interactionism, which studies how individuals construct social reality through symbols and interactions <sup>[3]</sup>. The goal of humanistic sociology is to develop a sociology that is relevant to everyday human concerns rather than just a detached, academic discipline <sup>[4]</sup>.

## 2. Historical Foundations of Humanistic Sociology

### 2.1 Early Influences

The roots of humanistic sociology can be traced back to classical sociological theorists who emphasized individual agency and moral engagement. Max Weber (1864–1920) introduced the concept of *Verstehen*, which means empathetic understanding—a key humanistic approach to studying human behavior <sup>[5]</sup>. Similarly, Émile Durkheim

(1858–1917), while often associated with structural functionalism, stressed the importance of collective consciousness and moral values in maintaining social cohesion [6].

## 2.2 Existentialism and Phenomenology

Philosophical traditions such as existentialism and phenomenology also significantly shaped humanistic sociology. Thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasized subjective experience, free will, and meaning-making, which later influenced humanistic sociologists who sought to incorporate these concepts into the study of social life [7].

## 2.3 C. Wright Mills and the Sociological Imagination

One of the key figures in modern humanistic sociology is C. Wright Mills [1], who criticized mainstream sociology for being overly focused on statistics and detached from human experience. He called for a "sociological imagination", which links personal experiences to broader social structures, emphasizing the importance of biography, history, and social context in shaping human lives.

# 3. Key Concepts in Humanistic Sociology

## 3.1 Sociology as a Moral and Ethical Science

Humanistic sociologists argue that sociology should not be value-neutral but should address ethical and moral concerns. Unlike positivist sociology, which aims for objectivity, humanistic sociology embraces subjectivity and human values in its analysis [8].

## 3.2 Symbolic Interactionism and Meaning Construction

Symbolic interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer, aligns closely with humanistic sociology. It focuses on how people create and interpret meaning through social interactions [3].

## 3.3 Critique of Positivism and Structuralism

Humanistic sociology rejects positivism and structuralism, which view individuals as passive products of social structures. Instead, it argues that humans have agency, creativity, and emotions that shape their interactions [9].

# 4. Applications of Humanistic Sociology

## 4.1 Social Justice and Activism

Humanistic sociology is closely linked to social justice movements, including civil rights, feminism, and environmental activism [10].

## 4.2 The Role of Art, Literature, and Culture

Humanistic sociology also explores art, literature, and cultural expression as forms of social meaning-making [\[11\]](#).

## 4.3 Qualitative Research Methods

Humanistic sociology prioritizes qualitative methods such as ethnography, interviews, and narrative analysis over statistical data [\[12\]](#).

## 5. Conclusion

Humanistic sociology represents a human-centered, value-driven approach to sociology that challenges scientific objectivity and structural determinism. By prioritizing meaning, ethics, and social engagement, it provides a richer understanding of social life. Future research in humanistic sociology is likely to focus on digital communication, social activism, and artificial intelligence's impact on human agency.

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## References

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