

# [The emergence of sociology](https://assignbuster.com/the-emergence-of-sociology/)

### What social forces were at work that led to the emergence of sociology in the late 18th and early 19th Century?

Sociology can be defined as the study of societies and their development in terms of their political decisions, ethics, economic development, religion and laws. It consists of the organization of collections of human bodies into forms of social life. The end of the 18th century was marked by the French Revolution, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution initiated in England. The purpose of this essay is to discuss these social forces in terms of their contribution towards the emergence of sociology.

The three major factors which influence the emergence of sociology as a sphere of study began in the late eighteenth century with the French Revolution, the period known as ‘ the Enlightenment’ and the industrial revolution.

Each one of these influences has contributed to what Karl Polanyi , the Austro-Hungarian philosopher termed ‘ the Great Transformation’ in his book of the same name, one of the results of this ‘ great transformation’ resulted in the emergence of the science of sociology. History began to change in 1789 when the French Revolution broke out followed by the Enlightenment – the creation of a new framework of ideas about man, society and nature. In addition, further economic and social changes were brought forward with the industrial revolution firstly in England and then in the whole of Europe.

The French revolution had lasted for ten whole years and was the first modern and ideological revolution of its kind. It had a great impact on society because it changed its structure. It managed to eliminate the social distinctions between people and the feudal society. The power shifted away from the Church and came to hands of the people. This was the first time people were seen as citizens. In addition to this, the clerical hierarchy which had existed until then gave up its rights and property. These changes had a historical, political and social impact in the entire of Europe and not just France. Plato and Aristotle had become exterminally manifest in the social and historical world as a consequence of the revolution in France.

Additionally, the French Revolution brought significant changes to the family since it was followed by the Declaration of Human Rights which stated that all humans are born free and equal. Changes to family-related issues were also brought into force. At the same time the Church lost much of its tremendous influence and power, which devolved to the people. The clerical hierarchy that had existed until then gave up its rights and property. ‘ Civil marriage’ and ‘ divorce’ were established. Civil marriage was another way for people to project their doubts upon the Church. A couple blessed by God could now follow different paths in their lives with the ‘ divorce’ being established and accepted. Education and religion were also subject to changes..

The second major event, that took place during the late 18th and early 19th century, was Industrialisation. The Industrial Revolution began in England in 18th century (1870) and brought several changes in societies, shaping them in the form they are today. It was “ the major shift of technological, socioeconomic and cultural conditions in the late 18th and early 19th century that began in Britain and spread throughout the world” (Wikipedia, Internet encyclopaedia).

At the end of the 18th century the world was experiencing a rapid population growth which led to an economic boom. As the demand was increasing, more workers were needed to cover the increasing demand. Production of goods increased. This was a different type of work before Industrialisation people were working in a traditional forms.

Technology brought significant changes in the work place which led to great improvement and efficiency. Machines were now helping people in production and thereby improving time efficiency and production volume as well as the conditions under which people worked. Technological changes included the use of iron and steel, new energy sources. These changes in technology improved both the quality of the products being produced as well as the work-conditions of the workers in production. Fewer efforts were now required by the workers in terms of producing a good. Technology also improved transportation and hence trade and commerce between countries. Markets expanded even more since goods and raw materials that were scarce in one country could be supplied from another. Machines became the symbols of the new society and humanity could be seen to be all working into this machine.

In addition, the area of communication also saw great improvement during this time period and people could now travel easier and reach their destination quicker. In the past, the only method people could communicate between them was through letters. This way of communication however, was both time consuming and uncertain since the letters were often lost somewhere in between. Fortunately, during the late 18th and early 19th century letters could be delivered faster and new ways of communication were developed such as the telegraph. These improvements also brought people and societies closer to one another. People moved to the cities were the markets began to emerge.

The Enlightenment was a significant contributing factor to the emergence of sociology in the late 18th and early 19th century. The Enlightenment is considered to be the source of critical ideas, such as the centrality freedom, democracy, and reason as primary values of society. It is the “ creation of a new framework of ideas about man, society and nature, which challenged existing conceptions rooted in a traditional world-view, dominated by Christianity” (Hamilton, 23). The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement consisting of many philosophers. The most popular figures of this new framework were Charles Montesquieu (1689-1755), Jacques Tugot (1729-1781) and Jean Condorcet (1743-1794). They managed to challenge the traditional and existing conceptions of the world.

The thinkers of Enlightenment aimed to teach people stop listening and following blindly the church’s opinion and decisions, and start thinking on their own. Challenge what they hear and develop their critical judgment. People were now advised to try and solve their problems on their own rather than wait for God to provide a solution for them. This new way of thinking was a big factor in economic growth. The iincreased education, through the emergence of upper class philosophers, the publishing of newspapers and the emergence of new types of media resulted in the arts, such a writing and painting to only develop, improve and flourish during that time period.

Reaching to a conclusion, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolutionand the Enlightenment were the three major factors that contributed towards the emergence of sociology in the late 18th and early 19th century. During this historical period, people’s lives became much easier and better. All these changes helped people become more open minded and created for them a life with more choices. , This important turning point in history led to a technological and economic boom. It also resulted in people learning to live in societies. “ A person who cannot live in society, or does not need to because he is self-sufficient, is either a beast or a God”. (Aristotle, Politics)

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