Some people accuse sociologists of observing conditions that are obvious. How does looking at sociology as, “making the familiar strange” help counter this claim?

How does sociology differ from common sense reasoning?
Tradition Versus Science

- Tradition: ancient people tried to discover how life works... but their theories were based on superstition, myth, or even position of the stars.
  - They did not test their assumptions
- Science: requires theories that can be tested by research
  - Mid 1800s, social observers began to use scientific methods to test their assumptions
Three Main Events

- The Industrial Revolution
- Revolution
- Imperialism
The Industrial Revolution

- Agriculture → factory production → masses of people migrate to cities
- Life in the city: long hours, awful pay, dangerous work
  - Child labor
- With their lives in upheaval, people could no longer rely on tradition to answer life’s big questions
Revolution

- American and French Revolution swept away the existing social order (and the answers it had provided)
- Stimulates original thinking, and brings new ideas
- Biggest idea to emerge: individuals possess inalienable rights
Imperialism

- Exposed to radically different ways of life, people began to ask why cultures differed.
The Scientific Method

- Using objective, systematic observations to test theories
- Sociology → applies the scientific method to questions about social life
Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Positivism

- A French Philosopher recognized as father of sociology
  - Reflected on the upheavals of the French Revolution and the changes he experiences moving to Paris
  - Did not complete college, suffered from depression
- Coined the Term “Sociology”
  - Believed social behavior had to be studied using the scientific method
  - The purpose of Sociology would be to discover social principles and then apply them to social reform
- Positivism: using scientific observation in the study of social behavior.
  - Applying the Scientific Method to Social World
  - “Armchair Philosophy”
  - (drawing conclusions from informal observations of social life)
English civil engineer, with a large inheritance in his 30s

Compared society to the body—like a body, society is composed of many parts working together to promote its well-being and survival.

Coined Phrase “Survival of the Fittest”
  - The Evolution of Societies
  - A natural process that improves societies— as generations pass the most capable and intelligent will survive and create more advanced societies

Opposed social reform and believed in the lower and higher forms of society.
  - Interfering is harmful to society.
Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Class Conflict

- German, middle class writer working as a writer and editor for a radical newspaper
- Deeply troubled by capitalist society
  - The way the economy is organized plays a large role in the structure of society
    - Those who own the means of production have all the power
    - Called for change through revolution
- Believed that the engine of human history is Class Conflict
  - A clash between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.
  - Resulting in classless society.
- Marxism is NOT communism
  - The political theory communism is a later application of his theory
  - “I am not a Marxist”
Durkheim (1858-1917) and Social Integration

- French philosophy professor
- Human behavior cannot be understood only in terms of the individual; we must always examine the social forces that affect people’s lives
  - Members of society are dependent on one another.
- Studied how social forces affect behavior
- Identified “Social Integration”—Degree to which people are tied to a social group
  - Studied suicide rates found that those with weak social ties are more likely to commit suicide
  - Tested through statistical analysis

1858-1917
Max Weber (1864-1920) and the Protestant Ethic

- Middle class, German
  - Founded the German Sociological Society
- Religion is central force in social change
  - Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
  - Roman Catholic tradition Vs. Calvinist tradition
- Research - Weber believed the following:
  - Sociology Should be Value-Free (personal beliefs should not affect research)
  - Sociology Should be Objective (neutral, not bias)
- Should put yourself in the shoes of others.
Values in Sociological Research

- Weber → sociology should be value free
  - A sociologist’s values (beliefs about what is good or desirable in life and the way the world ought to be) should not affect his or her research
  - Wanted objectivity – value neutrality – to be the hallmark of social research

- Replication: repeating a study in order to compare the new results with the original findings
  - Necessary because values of a sociologist can lead to unintended distortions in how finding are interpreted
Purpose and Use of Sociology

- **Purpose (two ideas)**
  - Goal is to simply advance understanding of social life
  - Goal is to investigate the social arrangements that harm people
    - Causes of poverty, crime, racism, war, etc.

- **Use**
  - No specific use for the knowledge
    - Can be used by anyone at any time for any purpose
  - Should be used to alleviate human suffering and improve society
    - Spearhead social reform
Verstehalan and Social Facts

- Weber and Verstehen
  - **Verstehen** (to understand, to grasp by insight)
    - The best interpreter of human behavior is someone who “has been there,” someone who can understand the feelings and motivations of the people being studied
  - **Subjective meanings** – how people interpret their situation in life, how they view what they are doing and what is happening to them.
  - By applying verstehen – your understanding of what it means to be human and to face some situation in life – you can gain insight into other people’s behavior
Durkheim and Social Facts

- **Social facts** – patterns of behavior that characterize a social group
  - U.S. Examples: June is the most popular month for weddings, suicide rates are higher among the elderly, more births occur on Tuesday than any other day of the week

- *Patterns that hold true year after year indicate that as thousands and even millions of people make their individual decisions, they are responding to conditions in their society*
How Social Facts and Verstehen Fit Together

• Example: More births on Tuesday than any other day?

• One → technology has made the hospital the dominating force in the medical system
• Two → caesarian section is much safer than before
• Three → doctors have replaced midwives
• Four → medicine is a business looking for profit

• Verstehen → mothers prefer to give birth in hospitals
  • Doctors schedule births for a time convenient to them
Sexism in Early Sociology

❖ Attitudes of the Time
  ❖ 1800s Sex roles rigidly defined
    ❖ Wife/mother (cooking, cleaning, children, clothes)
  ❖ Few people educated beyond basics
    ❖ Especially women

❖ Harriet Martineau
  ❖ Published *Society in America*
  ❖ Before Durkheim and Weber were born
  ❖ Her work was ignored
Racism at the Time: W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963)

- Sexism and racism considered normal at the time
- Each year between 1896 and 1914 Du Bois published a book on race relations
- A founder of the NAACP (national association for the advancement of colored people)
- Work was neglected by most sociologists until recently
  - Used science to disprove assumptions about race
  - Analysis: successful African Americans were breaking ties in order to win acceptance by whites
  - Weakened African American communities by depriving it of their influence
Jane Addams (1860-1935): Sociologist and Social Reformer

- Sociologist and social reformer
- Wanted to bridge the gap between the powerful and the powerless
  - Co-founded the American Civil Liberties Union
  - Campaigned for the 8 hour work day and for laws against child labor
- Co-Winner of Nobel Prize for Peace
  - Only sociologists to have received this award
Talcott Parsons and C. Wright Mills: Contrasting Views

- Talcott Parsons: influenced sociologists to look objectively at the world and to analyze abstract models of society theoretically
- C. Wright Mills: influenced sociologists to become social activists
The Continuing Tension and Applied Sociology

- Basic (or pure) sociology—proper role as analyzing some aspect of society and publishing their findings in books and journals
- Applied sociology—using sociology to reform society
Journal:

- Do you think that sociologists should try to reform society, or to study it dispassionately?
- Why?
Directions: Imagine you are a sociologist who is researching the topics listed above.

1. What kinds of questions would a basic/pure sociologist ask? (provide 3 examples per topic)
2. What kinds of questions would an applied sociologist ask? (provide 3 examples per topic)

Explain how these questions differ and the goal of pure sociology vs. applied sociology