



What's Wrong with Sociology?

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Since the 1950s sociology has experienced a decline in prestige when compared with the other social sciences. In some highly publicized cases some universities have retrenched their sociology departments, others are contemplating either retrenchment or downsizing of their departments. Although there are some practitioners of the discipline who believe that it has never been in better shape, many sociologists have come to believe that there are very serious problems both in the cognitive and social organization of the discipline. This book contains sixteen essays by sociologists who believe that their discipline faces very serious problems which must be overcome if the discipline is to survive and prosper. The contributors were selected to represent diverse views and thus there is substantial disagreement among them over what the problems are that sociology faces and how they may be remedied. In this highly provocative book readers is likely to find some essays they agree with and others they disagree with; but all the essays present important problems faced by the discipline which must be addressed. Although the authors of the sixteen essays do not agree on what is wrong with the discipline, there are some themes which appear frequently. In his introduction Cole summarizes and comments on these themes. His introduction centers on the question of whether sociology is entirely socially constructed. Is what we believe to be true about society constrained by empirical evidence or is it a result of our ideology, power, authority, and other social processes? One theme which appears in many of the essays is that sociology has become too ideological and as a result has lost credibility among university administrators, politicians and the general public. Many of the essays also stress the view that there are very low levels of consensus in sociology and that it is hard to see evidence of progress. Others criticize the discipline for not dealing with the really important social issues and see much of the work published as being parochial and trivial. Questions are also raised about why the use of causal models has failed to generate solutions to most of the problems the discipline addresses. Some authors believe that the discipline adheres to an overly rational model of human behavior and has failed to keep up with some of the advances introduced by post-modernist theories. This highly readable set of essays should be of interest to all those are concerned about the current state of sociology. They will also be useful in introducing graduate students to some of the most important issues currently being debated in the field. Stephen Cole is currently professor of sociology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook and professor of sociology at the University of Queensland, Australia. He is the author of *Making Science: Between Nature and Society*, and with Jonathan R. Cole, *Social Stratification in Science*.

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