

Sociology as an Art Form

Robert A. Nisbet

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Robert A. Nisbet : Sociology as an Art Form before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sociology as an Art Form:

9 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Vintage NisbetBy Steve JacksonRobert Nisbet (1913-1996) is a writer that every conservative should read. Perhaps more than any other thinker, Nisbet showed the connection between the decline of community and the rise of government. Although something of a libertarian, his approach to society provides an excellent contrast to such individualist libertarians as Murray Rothbard. (Although Rothbard's view of society is not inconsistent with Nisbet's.)In this excellent little work, Nisbet explains how sociology (and other disciplines) resembles art. For example, consider the "classes" that make up Marxian thought, or the themes in Tocqueville's works. In many ways they resemble the characters in a Dickens novel. Just as Dickens' characters were meant to be "exemplars" of a certain type, Marx, Weber and other sociologists describe their "types" with artistic imagery. Nisbet has a fascinating chapter in which he shows how many scientists have conceived their work in artistic terms. There is an aspect of creativity that can't be reduced simply to experiments and statistics. Nisbet relies, in part, on the ideas of Thomas Kuhn. (While I don't agree with Kuhnian relativism (if that's what he in fact taught), his insights have a certain validity as a description of how science operates.) Nisbet makes the interesting observation that while scientists and artists tend to work alone or in small groups, government wages "war" on cancer, poverty, or whatever. These government programs are generally less than successful and probably stifle progress.Nisbet was, strictly speaking, a sociologist. However, his work encompasses what might be called the "history of ideas." Even if your interest is neither sociology nor art, you should read this book. This edition also contains an excellent

introduction by Paul Gottfried. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An intriguing, scholarly, and enduring study. By Midwest Book Review. Written both for readers new to sociology and those experienced in its study, *Sociology As An Art Form* shows how the founding sociologists such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel created generalized portraits of whole classes of people as a reflection to the portraits found in the literature of their period. Delving into the links between sociology and art to present an appraised estimate of sociology's contribution to modern culture, *Sociology As An Art Form* by the late Robert Nisbet (1913-1996), formerly Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities, Columbia University, is an intriguing, scholarly, and enduring study recommended to students with an avid interest in this remarkable branch of the social sciences.

"One of our most original social thinkers," according to the *New York Times*, Robert Nisbet offers a new approach to sociology. He shows that sociology is indeed an art form, one that has a strong kinship with literature, painting, Romantic history, and philosophy in the nineteenth century, the age in which sociology came into full stature. *Sociology as an Art Form* is an introduction for the initiated and the uninitiated in sociology. Nisbet explains the degree to which sociology draws from the same creative impulses, themes and styles (rooted in history), and actual modes of representation found in the arts. He shows how the founding sociologists such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Simmel constructed portraits (of the bourgeois, the worker, and the intellectual) and landscapes (of the masses, the poor, the factory system), all reflecting and contributing to identical portraits and landscapes found in the literature and art of the period. In addition to marking the similarities between sociologists' and artists' efforts to depict motion or movement, Nisbet emphasizes the relation of sociology to the *fin de siècle* in art and literature, with examples such as alienation, anomie, and degeneration. He creates an elegant, brilliantly reasoned appraisal of sociology's contribution to modern culture. This book will be of interest to sociologists, artists, and anyone interested in how the fields relate to one another.

About the Author Robert A. Nisbet (1913-1996) was Albert Schweitzer Professor Emeritus of the Humanities at Columbia University. Some of his books include *The Sociological Tradition*, *History of the Idea of Progress*, and *Metaphor and History*. Paul Gottfried is professor of political science at Elizabethtown College in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *The Search for Historical Meaning*; *Conservative Millenarians: The Romantic Experience in Bavaria*; and *Arthur Schopenhauer and the Heritage of European Pessimism*. He is general editor of the *Religion and Public Life Series*.