



Processual Sociology

By Andrew Abbott



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For the past twenty years, noted sociologist Andrew Abbott has been developing what he calls a *processual* ontology for social life. In this view, the social world is constantly changing—making, remaking, and unmaking itself, instant by instant. He argues that even the units of the social world—both individuals and entities—must be explained by these series of events rather than as enduring objects, fixed in time. This radical concept, which lies at the heart of the Chicago School of Sociology, provides a means for the disciplines of history and sociology to interact with and reflect on each other.

In *Processual Sociology*, Abbott first examines the endurance of individuals and social groups through time and then goes on to consider the question of what this means for human nature. He looks at different approaches to the passing of social time and determination, all while examining the goal of social existence, weighing the concepts of individual outcome and social order. Abbott concludes by discussing core difficulties of the practice of social science as a moral activity, arguing that it is inescapably moral and therefore we must develop normative theories more sophisticated than our current naively political normativism. Ranging broadly across disciplines and methodologies, *Processual Sociology* breaks new ground in its search for conceptual foundations of a rigorously processual account of social life.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Abbott has long been one of sociology’s most fertile and original thinkers. These lucid and challenging essays display Abbott’s remarkably wide-ranging sociological intelligence at its best. Cumulatively, they articulate the core principles of a distinctively processual sociology, and they challenge us to recognize the irreducibly humanistic and moral nature of the sociological enterprise.”

(Rogers Brubaker, University of California–Los Angeles)

“*Processual Sociology*’s essays draw on a dizzying range of sources and examples, blended into a stunningly original, disruptive, and fecund analysis. The interrogation of such basic concepts as actor and outcome; the insights into the way that sequence and ecology frustrate causal reasoning; the effort to reconstitute macro-sociology on a radically micro-sociological foundation; and the reclamation of the moral dimension are just a few of this volume’s important themes. *Processual Sociology* is both a good read and an ambitious and compelling challenge to the way that social scientists understand and carry out their craft.”

(Paul DiMaggio, New York University)

“In *Processual Sociology*, Abbott makes clear that his ambition is to change sociology fundamentally. In elegant but also rigorous essays, he connects his seemingly disparate past writings and foreshadows a basic rethinking of social ontology. This starts from the historical character of individual life and moves on to connect historical demography to the nature of groups, the constant making and remaking of all cultural and social relationships, and the inextricable connection between the empirical and the moral. It is a brilliant book that makes one want to drop everything else to join in thinking about sociology’s hardest, most basic questions.”

(Craig Calhoun, director, London School of Economics)

“Abbott is the most surprising and innovative of today’s social theorists, in part because he combines disciplines as diverse as mathematical philosophy and literary theory. His work cuts in an entirely different way across the quantitative/qualitative and most other divides. Abbott repeatedly reverses the gestalts, advocating a lyrical sociology of contemporaneous flows rather than narratives explaining ‘outcomes’ abstracted from time, proposing that more is explained by problems of excess than problems of scarcity, and exposing concepts of inequality that run contrary to what we do in our own lives. This is a book to change the way sociologists think.”

(Randall Collins, University of Pennsylvania)

About the Author

Andrew Abbott is the Gustavus F. and Ann M. Swift Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago. He edits the *American Journal of Sociology*.

Users Review

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Gary Ackley:

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Nelson Berg:

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Daniel Carter:

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