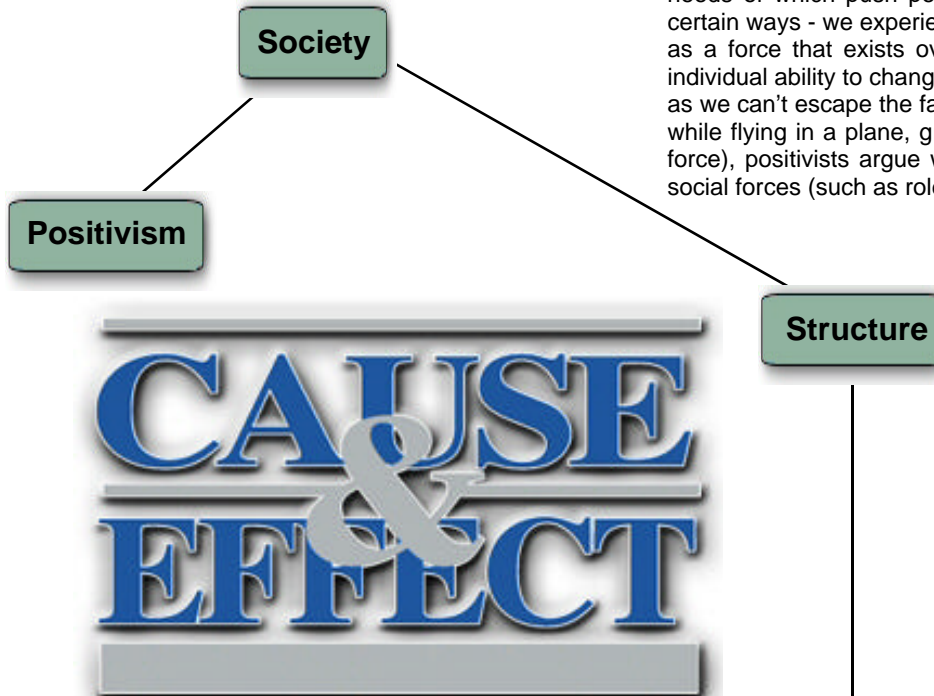


The social world is similar to the natural world in terms of how it can be studied, because human behaviour is, determined by rules developed within social groups.

Example: The need to survive leads people to develop work groups and the need to socialise children leads people to develop family groups.

Because societies are social systems - the needs of which push people to behave in certain ways - we experience the social world as a force that exists over-and-above our individual ability to change or influence it. Just as we can't escape the fact of gravity (even while flying in a plane, gravity still exerts a force), positivists argue we cannot escape social forces (such as roles or norms).



Science is concerned only with what is - rather than what we might want something to be - and scientists must be personally objective in their work (they don't get directly involved in the behaviour being studied; this avoids biasing or influencing the data collection process. The methods used should not depend on the subjective interpretations of a researcher and research should be capable of exact replication.

The task of (social) science is to isolate, analyse and understand the causes of human behaviour - and to understand how social forces shape behaviour we need to (systematically) study social groups rather than individuals.

Evidence about social behaviour is reliable and valid only if it is capable of being observed and tested. Anything not directly observable (such as people's thoughts) cannot be considered valid knowledge.

To reliably and validly study behaviour sociologists must use methods involving the use of our senses (sight, for example).



Auguste Comte (1798 - 1857) - the father of positivist thinking in Sociology