

Robert K. Merton and the Social Sphere of Sustainability.

Robert K. Merton is a social scientist in the tradition of the founders of sociology contributing to an understanding of sustainability's social sphere. The works of Merton and his colleagues are important contributors to those planning the future of the city. City planners need sociologists.

ThoughtCo's biography:

Robert K. Merton

By Ashley Crossman

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"Best known for developing theories of deviance, as well as the concepts of "[self-fulfilling prophecy](#)" and "role model," Robert K. Merton is considered one of America's most influential social scientists. Robert K. Merton was born July 4, 1910 and died February 23, 2003.

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION.

"Robert K. Merton was born Meyer R. Schkolnick in Philadelphia into a working class Eastern European Jewish Immigrant family. He changed his name at the age of 14 to Robert Merton, which evolved out of a teenage career as an amateur magician as he blended the names of famous magicians. Merton attended Temple College for undergraduate work and Harvard for graduate work, studying sociology at both and earning his doctorate degree in 1936.

CAREER AND LATER LIFE.

"Merton taught at Harvard until 1938 when he became professor and chairman of the Department of Sociology at Tulane University.

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"In 1941 he joined the Columbia University faculty where he was named to the University's highest academic rank, University Professor, in 1974. In 1979 Merton retired from the University and became an adjunct faculty member at Rockefeller University and was also the first Foundation Scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation. He retired from teaching altogether in 1984.

“Merton received many awards and honors for his research. He was one of the first sociologists elected to the National Academy of Sciences and the first American sociologists to be elected a foreign member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences.

In 1994, he was awarded the National Medal of Science for his contributions to the field and for having founded the sociology of science. He was the first sociologist to receive the award. Throughout his career, more than 20 universities awarded him honorary degrees, including Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Chicago as well as several universities abroad. He is also credited as the creator of the focus group research method.

“Merton was very passionate about the sociology of science and was interested in the interactions and importance between social and cultural structures and science. He carried out extensive research in the field, developing the Merton Thesis, which explained some of the causes of the Scientific Revolution.

His other contributions to the field deeply shaped and helped develop fields such as the study of bureaucracy, deviance, communications, social psychology, social stratification, and [social structure](#). Merton was also one of the pioneers of modern policy research, studying things such as housing projects, the use of social research by the AT&T Corporation, and medical education. Among the notable concepts that Merton developed are ‘unintended consequences,’ the ‘reference group,’ ‘role strain,’ ‘[manifest function](#),’ ‘role model,’ and ‘self-fulfilling prophecy.’”

“MAJOR PUBLICATIONS.

- Social Theory and Social Structure (1949)
- The Sociology of Science (1973)
- Sociological Ambivalence (1976)
- On The Shoulders of Giants: A Shandean Postscript (1985)
- On Social Structure and Science”

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