

# Ferdinand Tonnies

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the ideas of Ferdinand Tonnies, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Ferdinand Tonnies
2. Gemeinschaft
3. Gesellschaft

## 1. FERDINAND TONNIES

**Ferdinand Tonnies** was a German sociologist who studied social groupings and developed the famous categorization of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. During Tonnies' time, sociology as a discipline was being developed, with its origins rooted in trying to understand the transition from traditional society to modern society--to capitalism--with the onset of the Industrial Revolution.

There were massive social changes occurring because of industrialism; hence, sociology developed to explain them. Early sociologists were developing binaries, meaning two things set apart from each other--for instance, the modern versus the traditional. Tonnies' Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft are one of these binaries, or different ways to differentiate traditional society from modern society.



## PEOPLE TO KNOW

### Ferdinand Tonnies

A sociologist who studied social groupings and is famous for his categorization of social groups as Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.

## 2. GEMEINSCHAFT

**Gemeinschaft** is a form of community organization in which group membership, emotion, and adherence to tradition create solidarity and cohesion. This characterizes pre-modern societies Tonnies maintained. These are close-knit societies characterized with close ties--close family ties, close ties to community, strong emotional ties, and strong obedience to tradition and traditional ways of thinking, behaving and acting. The emphasis is on group solidarity and cohesion in these societies--they're relatively stable and they don't change very much.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Gemeinschaft

A form of community organization where group membership and tradition create bonds and solidarity.

## 3. GESELLSCHAFT

Conversely, **Gesellschaft** is a form of community organization in which individualism, modernization--the development of modern habits--and interdependent social needs create solidarity. The Industrial Revolution occurs, and brings with it the market mentality. The capitalist ethos that's associated with capitalism starts to spread and transform social relationships and group dynamics. People become much more individualistic and focused on the self, and more market-oriented. The interdependence of their market needs create solidarity.

### IN CONTEXT

To quote economist Adam Smith, "It's not from the benevolence of the butcher that we get our meat, but with regard to his own self-interest." Meaning that if you want your meat, he doesn't simply give it to you out of the goodness of his heart, with everyone together and close-knit like in Gemeinschaft. He gives it to you because he wants to make a profit from that meat in the market; therefore, you have to appeal to his self-interest.

Suppose you have a specialization in the market--you're a brewer, brewing beer. You engage in the market and trade with others in order to get money to then go buy everything else you need in the market. Everyone needs each other, and you all need this vast complex system of the division of labor to survive. This creates cohesion, because without each of those other people, you couldn't survive. The interdependence of your needs creates solidarity.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Gesellschaft

A form of community organization where individualism, modernization, and inter-dependent social needs creates solidarity.



## SUMMARY

Today you learned about German sociologist **Ferdinand Tonnies**, who studied social groupings, and his categorization of social groups, known as **Gemeinschaft** and **Gesellschaft**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



## TERMS TO KNOW

**Gemeinschaft**

A form of community organization where group membership and tradition create bonds and solidarity.

**Gesellschaft**

A form of community organization where individualism, modernization, and inter-dependent social needs creates solidarity.

**PEOPLE TO KNOW****Ferdinand Tonnies**

A sociologist who studied social groupings and is famous for his categorization of social groups as Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.