



## **Robert Nisbet: Communitarian Traditionalist (Library of Modern Thinkers)**

*By Brad Lowell Stone*

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### Editorial Review

#### From Library Journal

The conservative sociologist Robert Nisbet (1913-96) wrote extensively on community and social breakdown, articulating a principled perspective of the decline of civic-minded solidarity in light of the growth of the bureaucratic state. His key books include *Tradition and Revolt*, *Twilight of Authority*, and *History of the Idea of Progress*. In this intellectual biography, Stone (sociology and American studies, Oglethorpe Univ.) offers a systematic overview of Nisbet's contributions to sociology and the conservative movement. The author suggests that Nisbet's works "are an excellent place to start when persons are serious about the truths of our social world and when they seek guidance as to how they might better it." He compares Nisbet to those who have written in the communitarian vein, finding him far superior to such contemporary theorists as Robert Bellah and William Julius Wilson. On the whole, this is an uncritical biography, though Stone takes exception to a couple of relatively minor aspects of Nisbet's analytic framework. Recommended for libraries with special collections on conservative thought and/or sociological theory.

*Kent Worcester, Marymount Manhattan Coll., New York*

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#### From Booklist

The great philosophical sociologist Robert Nisbet (1913^96) emphasized one primary theme: that the contemporary desire for community was the result of alienation caused by politics. The rise of the modern centralized state, Nisbet held, came at the expense of other loci of authority, such as the church, the guild, the neighborhood, and the family, which together constitute society. As the state arrogated those other institutions' functions, it freed the individual person from their strictures but weakened society. The individual develops not in isolation but in relation to others and, lacking the obligations of membership in associations other than the state, feels unattached and yearns for community. With a clarity that matches his subject's, Stone outlines Nisbet's basic concepts, their philosophical roots (Greek, specifically Aristotelian), and their relationship to conservatism; and he presents Nisbet's assessment of the two disciplines to which he contributed, sociology and history. Finally, Stone marries Nisbet's thought to classical liberalism in order to formulate the challenge to new and revived community formation as a choice between re-creating intermediate institutions or continuing to delegate responsibility to the state--that is, a choice of either social pluralism and diffused authority or social monism and the centralized authority of a political elite. A sterling precis of a thinker who couldn't seem more relevant. *Ray Olson*

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#### Review

"A worthy contribution to the Intercollegiate Studies Institute's series, 'Library of Modern Thinkers.'" --  
*First Things, June 2000*

"ISI Books could hardly select a more perspicacious mind to probe than that of...Robert Alexander Nisbet." -  
- *University Bookman, Spring/Summer 2001*

"Stone has written an admirably clear, concise, learned, thoughtful, and not always uncritical, introduction to Nisbet's life and thought." -- *Washington Times, January 14, 2001*

"[S]tone's volume serves as a concise and admirable review of Nisbet's substantial intellectual legacy." --

*American Enterprise, March 2001*

"...[A] clear, well-presented account of Nisbet's crucial contribution to an important strain of modern American thought." -- *ForeWord, July 2000*

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