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VARIETIES OF SOCIOLOGY¹

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A request from the Sociology Club for a paper on "What is Sociology?" is something to ponder and philosophize upon. For nearly fourteen years the University has maintained a Department of Sociology; during ten years it has published a *Journal of Sociology*; for at least several quarters members of this club have pursued courses in sociology, listened to lectures on sociology, read articles entitled the "Province of Sociology," "The Scope of Sociology," "The Present Condition of Sociology," "The Future Prospects of Sociology"—and yet your president asks me to address you on the theme "What is Sociology?"

No one, so far as I know, is expected to produce papers in answer to such questions as "What is physics?" "What is chemistry?" or even "What is psychology?" Only the sociologist is made to stand and deliver at almost every turn. It would be easy to complain of this treatment, but if the student of society has the scientific spirit, he will ignore unpleasant personal implications and address himself to the facts. Why is this demand for definition so persistent? Why will the question refuse to stay answered? Why, after the safe phrase "the science of society" has been spoken, are no two answers to the question quite alike? How does it happen that Kidd can write the *Britannica* article on

¹A paper read before the Sociology Club of the University of Chicago, May 8, 1906.

sociology and never mention Giddings, while the latter contributes to *Johnston's* on the same subject a sketch which ignores Kidd? Does Comte's "intellectual anarchy" still reign in the field of social physics? Are the three philosophies still hopelessly confused?

The answer is obvious. Sociology is not one; it is many. There are varieties of sociology. If these have a specific unity, this is largely obscured by the patent diversities. The term "sociology" means several different things, brings up a variety of images in the minds of men and women today. Hence the impossibility of saying definitely and definitively what sociology is. Most of the articles which bear the familiar heading might better be entitled "What Sociology Ought to Be." Still, in spite of all, "sociology" continues to be a noun of multitude. Yet the vogue of the term "sociology" must mean that it serves some purpose in modern life; it must stand for groups of ideas and give at least vague expression to them. What are the chief of these, the leading varieties of sociology?

But before addressing ourselves to this question, let me offer a few prelusive prolegomena upon the different attitudes which sociologists may take toward those who regard them with ill-concealed suspicion or amused tolerance. The protective instincts lead men of different temperaments to meet attack in different ways.

There is first of all the jocular sociologist, who disarms criticism by joining in the cheerful game of ridiculing his own chosen pursuits. This provides entertainment; it relieves the playful student from any suspicion of taking himself too seriously; it makes for good-fellowship and general merriment. But this jovial mood may easily go too far. There are strict limits to its value; it may easily degenerate into a kind of unconscious cynicism which destroys the earnestness and efficiency of the man into whose character it subtly makes its way.

Quite different from the jocular type is the over-serious sociologist, who feels himself the guardian of the ark, who walks with stately, even pompous stride, and betrays in his bearing a dignity almost pontifical. This, too, makes for amusement, but

not among the elect. The oracular, self-satisfied, and wholly convinced sociologist is not a type to be exalted, or, as Tarde would say, to be made a glorious center of radiating waves of imitation.

Again, there is the sensitive sociologist, wandering about the vague borders of his field waiting for assaults by predatory economists, historians, and political scientists, who are likely to regard him as a scientific poacher—although, to be sure, rather a poor shot. This pathetic soul is sure to have woes and wrongs, and may even, with due provocation, manage for himself a mild type of immolation. He is not an alluring object; his “particularization,” as Baldwin might say, is in little danger of being “generalized” by the group of sociologists.

Once more, there is the arrogant sociologist. He takes possession of the farm with assurance, contemptuous of the narrow, grubbing, and unrelated tasks of the specialists in the different fields. Or, to change the figure, he sets himself up as a kind of scientific “boss,” who will brook no interference, but makes quite clear what the duties of his “heelers” are. This kind of person must be caught young and reared upon mouth-filling phrases of a cosmic scope, quite detached from the humble researches of those plodding scientists who provide him with materials for generalization.

Sociology insists upon synthesis; the wise student of society will choose from these different attitudes elements of value. He will be a little jocular now and then; he may be a trifle sensitive when pushed too far; he should have the spirit to hold his own on occasion; he will feel a serious purpose dominating all his work. In short, he will maintain toward men and life the becoming attitude of the philosopher, seeking to know the why and how of things, sparing of praise and blame.

As we turn to the varieties of sociology, we note first the generic or catalogue use of the word. “Sociology” is the name for the large cabinet within which are to be found the pigeon-holes of the various social sciences. Thus, in Dewey’s library system “sociology” is the main heading, under which “political economy,” “political science,” “anthropology,” “ethnology,”

"penology," etc., form subgroups. This use of the term is convenient and has the sanction of good usage. In the annual French publication, *L'Année sociologique*, one finds subdivisions into "general sociology," "religious sociology," "moral and juridical sociology," "economic sociology," etc. In the first publication of the London Sociological Society there are papers on "Eugenics," "Civics," "The Position of Woman in Early Civilizations," and "Life in an Agricultural Village in England." Whether sociology ought to be used in this comprehensive fashion to include all aspects of social phenomena is, perhaps, fit subject for academic discussion, but such discussion would have little influence upon the facts. The word is used, and by intelligent people, as a label for all things social. It is convenient for this purpose, and will doubtless be employed in this popular way for many decades to come. It must be reluctantly admitted that people will continue to say "sociological" and "psychological" when any expert could tell them that what they really mean to say is "social" or "societary" or "psychic." It is quite futile to protest against popular usage of this sort, especially when it lends itself so readily to the expression of current ideas. The sociologist who wishes to set the public right will have all his spare energies employed in trying to make "the man in the street" distinguish between sociology and socialism. It may violate our scientific sensibilities, but we shall have to resign ourselves to letting people use the word "sociology" as a kind of omnibus to carry all the social sciences on their sometimes halting and often zigzag journey.

It is hard for sociologists, after having been so contemptuous about the philosophy of history, to face the fact that sociology is in large measure, as Barth insists, precisely this. Spencer has pointed out that the savage who explains the uprooting of a tree by the tempest as the work of angered spirits, and the modern scientist who attributes these phenomena to the force of air-currents, are both employing the same intellectual method, although under different conditions. It is equally true that to interpret the history of humanity in terms of a self-revealing spirit or of a divine purpose is in principle not different from an explana-

tion which implies the trend from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, from simplicity to complexity, or which talks of adjustment to environment of struggling groups and interests and the "increasing individuation of the race." In both cases we have a process described by Mr. Fiske in that classically limpid term "deanthropomorphization."

To set forth in a large way the sweep of history, the development of institutions, is strictly to philosophize. To translate the forms and activities of society into the terms of anatomy and physiology is not to make a science—it is to philosophize in other phrases. To describe the common life of human groups in terms of social consciousness and public will is, strictly speaking, not to create a new science, but again to philosophize in another fashion. It is freely admitted by almost all sociologists that the subject is largely a philosophy; that it seeks to put together into one picture the various details which the social sciences provide. It is in a sense what Flint calls a "science of the sciences," which is only another way of saying that it philosophizes, synthesizes, their results.

Nor is there a single social philosophy. There are as many philosophies as there are different points of view. *Individualism* is a social philosophy which lays stress upon the initiating person consciously exploiting his fellows, carefully weighing his interests against those of society, feeling free in his choices, and accepting responsibility for his acts. On the other hand, there is a *collectivistic sociology* which lays all the emphasis on society and on social forces which are thought of as molding the individual to a type. Freedom of the will becomes hardly more than an illusion, and responsibility is diffused throughout society as a whole. There is, too, a *materialistic sociology* which sees in all social institutions the inevitable product of soil, climate, flora, fauna, and race; while over against this stands an *idealistic philosophy* interpreting social life and destiny in terms of "divine purpose," "perfectibility of humanity," or "stages in the progress of human consciousness of God." It used to be the fashion to deride such terms as *Christian sociology* and to show conclusively that a Christian sociology was quite as absurd as Baptist mathematics or Episcopal physics.

This smart saying, however, holds true only of sociology as a well-defined science—not as philosophy. It must be admitted, therefore, that there is a Christian sociology—i. e., an interpretation of the social order in terms of Christian doctrines and ideals. There can be a *Catholic sociology* or a *Mohammedan sociology*, or any type of social theory which interprets human life and destiny from some definite standpoint. To admit that sociology is a philosophy is not to detract from its dignity or value. If it were nothing more than a philosophy, it would justify itself. To have insisted upon seeing the social process whole, to have influenced the spirit and methods of all the social sciences, to have oriented them in a new direction—these are enduring services in which the sociologist may well feel satisfaction.

But sociology is more than a collective name, more than a philosophy of history. It is a science in the making. This is to be affirmed with faith, if not with dogmatism. The fact is widely denied, and in no pleasant terms. Thus a recent writer declares: "The name 'sociology' stands for no definite body of systematic knowledge. It is applied to an inchoate mass of speculation, often vague and conflicting, which represents the thoughts of various thinkers about social phenomena." The same person goes on to say that sociologists "appear to realize confusedly that they have on their hands a pedagogical 'white elephant' which defies classification."² Sociologists are ready to admit that as a science their subject is a becoming rather than a being. Tarde speaks of "this infant which people have undertaken to baptize before it was born."³ Bascom sententiously remarks that "it will do no harm to call it a science, if we do not abate our effort to make it one."⁴ Both within and without the field, then, men recognize the fact that sociology as a science is at best in the incipient stage.

Two tests may be applied to a science. Does it formulate definite, precise, general laws; is it able to predict the behavior of phenomena? One of the writers who have just been quoted

²Baldwin, "Present Position of Sociology," *Popular Science Monthly*, October, 1899.

³*La Logique sociale*, Preface, p. v.

⁴Quoted by Howerth, *Annals of American Academy*, September, 1894.

says: "It is impossible, I believe, to discover a single alleged ground-principle of sociology that has commanded general assent." This is a depressing statement. One hesitates to believe that things are quite so bad as that. Yet it must be owned that the number of laws of general sociology which differentiate themselves clearly from the platitudinous or the axiomatic is not large. Ross has in his latest volume⁵ offered a list of social laws—some of them analogies from other sciences, some set forth as valid formulæ of sociology itself. One of these laws asserts that man-to-man struggle within a group weakens its efficiency in conflict with other groups. A principle like this is fundamental to all association; it is an induction from a wide field of social phenomena. It finds illustration as well in the struggles of a political "gang" as in the imperial policy of a great nation or in an attack upon the Mormon church. It is as precisely stated as "Gresham's law" or the law of "diminishing returns." To deny that sociology is making advance in the formulation of general principles is to blind one's self to facts. And yet the point where complacent satisfaction with achievement can be indulged lies far beyond the distant horizon.

Whether sociology as science is to be called "general" or "pure;" whether it is, as Giddings would have it, a "fundamental" science, or, as Small prefers to regard it, an organizing science, are interesting and important matters for consideration. The latter views, which seem at first glance antithetical, are after all to be reconciled. The contrast is something like that between induction and deduction. Both are aspects of one process. There is increasing agreement that sociology as science must deal with principles of association as such—principles which find concrete expression under varying conditions. These principles are fundamental, but they must be derived largely, as Small points out, from the results which the special social sciences provide. But such principles thus discovered in turn react upon the special sciences themselves.

There is good ground, then, for regarding sociology as a science, even though it be only a science in the making. Nor is

⁵Ross, *Foundations of Sociology*.

the chaos so complete as the cynical would have us believe. Sociologists, to be sure, have not reached a consensus comparable, for example, with that of the economists; but when variations in terminology have been eliminated, a considerable and ever-widening area of agreement emerges from the apparent confusion. Thus, as to society in general all agree that it is (1) a product of physical and psychical forces, (2) working in an evolutionary process in which (3) at first predominantly instinctive activities later yield in some measure to (4) reflective and purposeful policies. This view regards society as (5) an ongoing process in which interests and groups struggle for ascendancy and are ceaselessly organized and reorganized. As to the social group as a type of common mental life, it is further agreed that (1) individuals in their very personal growth unconsciously incorporate the standard of their group, by which they are, furthermore, (2) coerced into conscious conformity. The uniforming influence of imitation and group-ascendancy is counteracted by (3) leaders or authorities who initiate new ideas and activities to be selected and appropriated by all. Between such leaders with their followers a (4) struggle for ascendancy ensues. This results ultimately in (5) a relatively permanent body of customs and institutions imbedded in feeling; i. e., group-tradition or character. When the members of the group are aware of common ideas and purposes, a (6) social consciousness is developed.

If the tests of a science be formulation of laws and power to predict, sociology is not far advanced on the road to a scientific status. Such laws as have been put into definite form are, as has already been suggested, apparently an "elaboration of the obvious," or are philosophical rather than strictly scientific. Nevertheless, especially in the field of social psychology, more successful results have been achieved. Principles closely approaching in insight and accuracy the unquestioned laws of economics have been enunciated, and promise of progress in this direction is not wanting.⁶ As to prediction, which is conditioned on the formulation of principles, the sociologist is even more cautious than the economist about foretelling a result in a given case. Certainly

⁶Cf. Ross, *op. cit.*

the point has not been reached where the sociologist is justified in dogmatizing on the basis of his scientific principles.

While, therefore, the sociologist is in no position to shout "Eureka," he has good reason to press on, with the confidence that sociology as a science will make for itself a place and render fundamental service to all the social sciences. The results of work being done in the field of folk-psychology, in the origin and development of such institutions as the family, private property, etc., may legitimately be claimed for sociology as a science. These are tangible, increasingly defined and precise, and are furthering the reinterpretation of many other problems.

Sociology is not only a general title, a philosophy of history, a science, but it is an art which seeks to translate principles into social welfare. The term "social technology," proposed by Dr. Henderson, is full of suggestion. It is this meaning of sociology which rises inevitably in the public mind, To the newspapers the sociologist is the man who deals with the problems of dependence, vice, and crime. Settlement residents, probation officers, investigators of housing conditions, students of penology, are all known to the reporter as "sociological workers."⁷ Sociologists of the philosopher-scientist type used to resent this identification of sociology with social pathology. They were wont to insist, with some show of superiority, that the study of the normal was after all the important thing. One almost fancies that they resented a little the idea that sociology was chiefly concerned with caring for the "submerged tenth." There has been in the last decade a more tolerant and sympathetic attitude displayed. It is coming to be recognized that social technology and social science are engaged in mutual service, that the study of dependence and crime has fruitful results for social theory, while in turn social

⁷A typical newspaper attitude toward men and methods in this field is that of the *New York Sun*, as illustrated in the half humorous, half satirical accounts of the annual visit of Professor Bailey's Yale class to New York tenement districts and charitable institutions. The story of this pilgrimage was told the other day under the heading "Bill Bailey's Sociologers." The peregrinations of this party, which always includes a few divinity students, are depicted with much cleverness. The suggestion throughout is that of naive, unsophisticated, academic persons who deal with life in a *a priori* fashion.

theory offers guidance in practice. It would be futile for the sociologist, even were he so inclined, to change the popular impression that sociology is chiefly concerned with what are known as the social problems.

If our analysis be true, sociology means at least four somewhat different things, each of which might be further subdivided. To certain minds this diversity is a source of discouragement. The people who like to have their work laid out in definite fashion, who want to see the way made plain, the highroads fenced, the fields clearly bounded, are likely to be disheartened by the picture which this paper presents. But there is another point of view. Classifications and definitions are valuable to prevent confusion, to frustrate duplication, to keep the same things from being called by different names. But, after all, there is a certain arbitrariness about classification and methodology. The problem is the important thing. This is a day of borderland problems, when students in search of truth follow where the pursuit may lead, even though they transgress old scientific boundaries once held almost sacred. Definition and terminology record results even more than they guide to achievement. It is, I think, possible to note in sociology a slight reaction from the discussion of scope and method, valuable as this has been, toward the study of problems, the grouping of phenomena, the formulation of principles which later on will become subject-matter for organization and systematizing. A cynical writer in the *Nation* a half-dozen years ago advised sociologists to give less thought to what they themselves were called and what name was given to their pursuits, and to concentrate their energies on showing results for which labels could later be easily supplied. There are signs that this worldly wisdom is finding expression in sociology today. Perhaps the best advice to the young and aspiring sociologist is this: If you are unduly anxious about sociology, its meaning, its scope, its method, its future—throw off the burden of anxiety; and turn to some concrete problem of the common life, seek to make it your own, relate it to some general principle, give it a newer and truer interpretation. In the absorption of the work you will forget your uncertainty as to what it ought to be called.