

THE SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPT.

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The idea which we express by the signs "social" and "society" is common to all peoples and all languages; is older than literature and is found in the most ancient traditions. But the expression "social science" has a meaning which is modern and specific; and it deserves careful and serious attention. We owe the suggestion to August Comte, a famous French scholar, who just before the middle of the nineteenth century undertook to write a comprehensive system of "Positive Philosophy." He proposed to classify knowledge into five sciences: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry and biology in order. In his day all of these were recognized as he arranged them and the phenomena assigned to them respectively had been subjected to the positive or scientific method of treatment. But Comte further observed a large and important mass of phenomena arising out of the relations of man with man in society which could not be classified in any of the five sciences which he had recognized. These he grouped together under the designation of social phenomena and asserted that they too must be subjected to the positive method of treatment, proposing to call the resulting body of knowledge sociology and ranking it in his system sixth and last in order of complexity.

In the next generation the German political scientist Schaeffle and the English philosopher Herbert Spencer not only treated social phenomena by the positive method but declared society to be an organism. Though as a working hypothesis this theory did not fully accord with the facts, yet there seemed to be some degree of truth in it. Sociologists are not satisfied to cast it aside altogether. Some limit themselves to saying cautiously that

society is organic, like an organism, having essential resemblances to an organism. Others would take the suggestion of Lester F. Ward that if we are to rely upon the analogy between society and an organism we must seek the analogous organism among the lowest biological orders, among the protozoa for instance, where the brain and other important functioning organs are not differentiated and localized in one part of the body, as in higher organisms, but are diffused. Thus the brain is localized in man but not in society. We may not permit ourselves to say as Spencer did that the brain of society is represented by the governing or regulating body. This statement may seem to be rather plausible when applied to a despotic monarchy. But it is plain, even to the cursory observer, that it gives a very inadequate characterization of the real directive agency in a modern popular government where the dependence of elected representative officers upon their constituents is obvious and notorious and a matter of fundamental principle.

But however close or remote the analogy between society and an organism, sociologists are agreed in recognizing an important and comprehensive class of phenomena in which the essential unit is not the individual but the group, in which the group unit, as such, shows growth, increasing complexity, differentiation of function and organ, adaptation to environment, degeneration under adverse conditions, and development and progress under favorable conditions. The individual may have his part in making the group what it is. But it is a fact equally conspicuous that the group has its part in making the individual what he is; and that what it makes of him is even incidental to what it is and is becoming. The individualist, representative of the philosophy of a century ago, studied the individual as such. The individual, made in God's likeness, was to him the supreme, the sublimest entity. The sociologist is by definition a student of society, of the group, and only incidentally of the individual as contributing to or as affected by it. Hence the socio-

logical concept, the working hypothesis of the sociologist, is that there are entities which are composed of individuals in some organic relation. The number of individuals in the various social entities may be larger or smaller; the organization may be more or less perfect. The same individual may be a member of more than one of these groups at the same time. Yet even so each entity has its nature and being, its end and purpose, and its modes of behavior apart from other groups and from the individuals which compose it, a nature and being which are the proper subjects of study by observation, experiment, and induction.

It is a proposition which almost states itself that the immediate end of sociology must be the development of the group entity, be it class, caste, community, state, or race. But it does not follow that this development is to be considered an end in itself. Is it not rather to be treated as a means to the higher development of the individuals into which the group must at last be analyzed? Is it not perhaps true that the individualist of old dropped a link in his chain of reasoning and neglected a factor both helpful and necessary in perfecting the individual? Is it not the mission of the sociologist to show that the highest type of individuality is to be found in the individual who is himself the product of the most highly developed group? If indeed this is the ultimate end to which the sociologist may conduct us the mind can scarcely comprehend the vastness, the grandeur, and the sublimity of his task and opportunity.

In the first place, this sociological concept, with all its dreamed of possibilities, is at least entitled to the toleration which is universally accorded to a working hypothesis in positive science. So long as the rule is new or has not been frequently tried or is thought to be based upon too narrow or uncertain a range of facts or observations to deserve complete confidence and dependence it may be called a working hypothesis and the experimenter will have a double interest in applying it. If by its aid he is

able to explain the facts which he has observed he will place confidence in the explanation and increase his reliance upon the hypothesis. This is the situation with the sociological hypothesis. It must still be tested as it is applied. Time and experience will undoubtedly give us some important corrections as they will most certainly give us many additional facts and laws based upon the facts.

Secondly and specifically, the sociological theory deserves consideration because it furnishes a very satisfactory test of the older theories, confirming some of them and making apparent the weakness of others, offering at the same time a more satisfactory solution of the problem in hand. One instance of the latter sort is the theory of paternalism in government, which has given way to the theory of an individualistic society; and now both have yielded place through weakness in certain points to the sociological. The paternalistic theory imputed to the head of the state a function that was fatherly. One of the most conspicuous exponents of it was Frederick the Great, of Prussia. He in his time epitomized the essential philosophy of it in the figure by which he sought to characterize and magnify his royal function when he called himself the "first servant" of his people, the one who was accountable before the world and before God for their welfare, the one whose office and responsibility it was to care for them. This he did with a degree of officiousness in political, economic, and social matters that gave him the title of the "benevolent despot."

Before the end of the eighteenth century this theory of government was found to be leading monarchs and statesmen to indulge in the public regulation of affairs to a degree that people began to resent as undue and harmful interference with the liberty of the subject, especially in economic matters. So a revolution was worked out both in philosophy and in the practices of government.

This revolt led to the promulgation of the theory of in-

dividualism. As a political and economic doctrine it is negative. It is the doctrine later formulated by Jefferson that the people best governed is the people least governed, that the government should busy itself about the fewest things possible. Some things were by long experience and common consent admitted to belong to the government, which because of them had a reason for existence. But the other things were best done when the government left them alone; when they were left to each individual and to each community to attend to as private and local interests dictated. Adam Smith developed it into a system of political economy that first helped to change and then came to express the economic ideas of the generation which succeeded him. Moreover he and his disciples elaborated it into a system of philosophy making selfishness, the self-interest of the individual, its corner stone. It assumes that a man can rightly discern and successfully achieve his own best interests if he will; if he does not the fault is his own. Again a man rightly discerning and rightly achieving his own best interests cannot harm his fellows if he would but must promote their interests whether he would or not. It is therefore his policy to seek to know his own interests intelligently and to follow them faithfully; thus will he best serve himself, his generation, and mankind.

The new theory of individualism grew apace and seemed to be vindicated by changes in industrial life. But scarcely had the first quarter of the nineteenth century passed before the validity of this working hypothesis was challenged by alarming facts that were all too pitiful and patent. Men became conscious of the fact that the property holding classes of England, especially the factory and mine owning classes of England whom the revolutionized processes of industry had raised to a prominence which they had not before had, persisted in seeking their selfish interests at the expense and to the hurt of the very life energy of the working classes; and that the latter, however clearly they might see their own interests, could

but see also how hopelessly unable they were to protect themselves. Society must take heed; the government did come to their aid. But first the rising spirit of democracy had to force the great reform bill through a privileged Parliament. Then there came into the new House of Commons the representatives—not of the lower radical classes—but of the sturdy middle class of English manhood who did not hesitate to insist that the government should lay its hands upon the abuses and correct them. So factory acts were passed regulating the number of hours which employers might require women and children to labor in their factories. Mine acts were passed forbidding the employment of women and children under ground and limiting the ages and hours of work of those employed above ground. Acts were passed protecting the poor little chimney sweeps. The Earl of Shaftesbury, the seventh of an illustrious line, was a pioneer in securing these reforms. He ranks as one of the great reformers of the nineteenth century; and it is incredible to us that in the second quarter of that century he should still have had to struggle so hard and even to endure the disdain of his peers before he could get a hearing for matters that are to-day the commonplace of philanthropy. We are now taught that we are our brothers' keepers. We are warned that we must be held responsible for much of their condition. We are shown that man is not an independent self-sufficient unit, a law and an end unto himself, who can be left to follow his own desires and use his opportunities without restraint. It appears that he cannot control his own desires within the limits necessary if the degree of welfare which we concede as a right to others is to be respected. If his opportunities are great he will use them to abuse others. If they are too few they do not suffice him to protect himself. He either needs restraint or protection. He cannot be left entirely free. We are taught to observe that he is a member of a group which must restrain him, protect him, and direct him.

Thirdly, not only negatively—as eliminating unten-

able theories—but positively—as gathering up and interpreting the theories which have stood the test of time and have long enjoyed public approval—does the new sociological hypothesis concerning the character and nature of the group command consideration. In the light of the new hypothesis the state is but the people politically organized seeking through the agency of government to procure those ends which may be best achieved in this way. But it is a question to be discussed in political theory and practical statecraft what ends it is proper for peoples to procure through their political organization and what governmental forms are best suited to certain ends and conditions. From the sociologist's point of view it would seem that political organizations are not all comprehensive nor are governments all powerful. But the theory long so dear to Americans and to Baptists, the separation of state and church, is founded in the very nature of things. We now realize that it is not best for state or church, good government or spiritual religion, to try to promote religious interests and political interests by one and the same compulsory organization.

Still another theory rescued from the wreck of old economic doctrines presents in the new light of modern social science such a broad, expanding, elevating, ennobling conception of man's highest wants that it deserves to be treated separately as a fourth co-ordinate reason for giving consideration to the working hypothesis of the sociologist.

The Ricardian theory of economics laid the stress on production. It was a question of making the greatest product at the least cost, of selling it at the highest price, and of netting the greatest gain to the producer. But the modern school looks at the matter in a different light. It puts human happiness as the great end, not the producer's gain. According to the conceptions cherished by the members of this school man does not simply live to work; he works to live, and to live more abundantly. Man is conceived to be a being with wants which are ex-

pansible. The want or desire for a good of any given kind, granted the means with which to obtain it, will grow. But the quantitative increase of any particular want is the least important part of the expansion, for in fact it is very limited. Of bread one soon gets enough. Money is accounted the only material good of which everybody always wants more than he has. New wants will arise and human wants should not only increase in variety but should also improve in quality.

As they are not all to be accounted of the same worth what should be accepted as the standard of valuation? Shall it be a physical standard; that of the athlete? An intellectual standard; that of the scholar? A moral standard? Above and beyond all these is there not a spiritual standard? If God created us in his own spiritual likeness shall we presume to ignore the significance of that fact, making no provision for the cultivation of the spiritual side of our nature, the development of our spiritual wants? It is indeed unquestionably a matter of ethical and spiritual moment which of our wants are developed. The *laissez-faire* theory would let it alone and leave every individual to his own unguided, self-determined inclinations. But it is very plain that people are not so left. They are environed with civil, moral, and social laws. Under the uncontrolled operation of the struggle for existence the fittest to survive might be the lowest morally; fist-right overmastering moral right. But that we will not consent to allow. We are our brothers' keepers, theoretically, actually, positively. We defend them and we constrain them, also, in the way they should go.

Now who should be most concerned regarding the proper oversight over these matters? Can the high-minded consent to abdicate in favor of those of lower ideals? Will not the Christian positively assert and confidently maintain that the Christian ideals include all that is best in the other ideals of health, of intellectual vigor and activity, of culture, of art, of civilization, of morals—and the religious and spiritual ideals beside, striving to

realize them in social and in individual thought and rule and practice? But to such an end no theory of life could be more favorable than this of the modern economists. It calls upon us to conceive and to plan the noblest things for the individual and to devise the wisest means for their realization, through the agency of social forces among others.

So then, fifthly, the working hypothesis of the social scientist commands our acceptance as Christians because it predicates an end, a goal, an aspiration to human development.

In studying the history of social groups to discover the law of their formation and development Ward has been led to the discovery of two classes of forces in operation: the genetic and the teleological. "The difference between telic and biological genesis may be expressed by saying that under genetic processes the subject has to yield to environment. Only those specimens live which are fitted to survive or are plastic enough to become adapted to the environment. But telic man changes the environment and adapts it to himself; as when a man by the aid of fire and clothing overcomes the rigors of a harsh climate. This distinction which is easy to make and illustrate in the case of the individual also applies to society. Some of the progress of society may be genetic; how much is undetermined. But the rest is planned and purposed by society itself through its governing agency. Some social progress is clearly telic."* Now Ward is an avowed materialist and will trace genetic progress no further back than to the unconscious force of environment and the telic progress no further than to intuition. But I apprehend no difficulty in the way of the Christian theist, with his belief in God, accepting the classification of Ward for he will simply refer both environment and intuition back to God as their author. In the Christian philosophy of life man is something more than a material

* Page 721, "Political Economy, Political Science, and Sociology," University Association, Chicago, 1899-1900. Cf. Ward's *Outlines of Sociology*. pp. 182 ff.

or even a merely conscious, reasoning being. Neither his physical nor his intellectual nature nor both together comprise his whole being. There is a spiritual part to his nature. He has an immortal soul and there is an element of the divine in him that has been developed some; but perhaps, nay shall we not certainly believe, is capable of vastly more than he has yet attained or we can now comprehend that it is possible for him to attain. Man has been developing his God-like faculties. Sometimes unconsciously, but sometimes also consciously and with a realization of the end to which he is aspiring he has shaped his course excelsior, excelsior. If we are to live as immortal spirits forever in the presence of God who is Spirit does it not follow that we as Christians must look upon our spiritual faculties as the noblest part of our natures and the development of these faculties as a Christian duty and the goal of all our striving? If this is the end towards which we are tending shall we not make use of every scientific principle that may serve to help us direct our efforts intelligently? To my mind there is no doubt that the study of the telic purpose, the philosophy of history, promotes this sublime end.

Again and sixthly, the sociological working hypothesis commands our favorable consideration because it allows full value and effect to all of the moral and religious agencies through which people have tried to work. It outlines a system in which each one is seen to be a social organ performing its appropriate function more or less successfully, with more or less permanent and ennobling results.

It looks upon society as an aggregate of individuals with many and varied interests, some mutual, some opposed. Those who have opposed interests oppose each other and those whose interests are the same associate to promote their common interests. Each individual is looked upon as a member of more than one of these groups at one and the same time, following out many purposes as intelligently, consistently, effectively as possible. So-

ciologists are studying the process of association and conflict, the nature of groups, the forces that differentiate them, and the functions which they serve. They are not only watching the movements of social groups in contemporaneous society. They are studying also the history of institutions, industrial, political, religious, or of whatsoever other sort they may be, identifying the forces that brought them into existence, discerning the methods of their operation, their adaptation to the ends to be accomplished, and the substitution of better institutions in place of them at the appropriate time.

Property, private property, in goods and in land, is one of the oldest and most general and most universally and highly respected of institutions. Yet we can certainly go back to civilizations in which at least private property in land was not recognized; and it is now a question of serious and pressing importance with scientists who study history and with men who love equity and righteousness whether the existing rights in land and goods are not used in some respects contrary to public welfare. Religion is an institution as old as association itself. It is one of the characteristics of a man that he should want to know his Maker and strive, if ever so crudely, to figure to himself who and what his Maker is that he may fall down before him and worship and propitiate him.

It is entirely unnecessary to demonstrate the importance of Christianity as an institution in the world's history. But it is in point to show how the world is coming to appreciate the fact as never before. It is not so very long ago that secular history was exclusively political, scarcely more than a chronicle of royal acts. Then it became constitutional also in its scope, then industrial, and institutional, with special reference to secular institutions. We have a history of art and a history of literature. It is now beginning to be realized more clearly that ecclesiastical history is not a professional subject for theological schools alone. Historians are coming to treat the mediaeval church as one of the most influential among

the social institutions of the Middle Ages. This period fell heir to the literature and philosophy of Greece and to the law and administrative system of Rome. But incomparably greater than all these was the contribution of Christianity in respect of "the definiteness and confidence of its teachings on the immortality of the soul, and the expiation of sin," "the tender fatherhood of God," and the belief "that an intimate personal tie had been established between" the Christian "and God by the Savior."*

Education, charity, and morals are other important classes of public interests which require proper organs or institutions to care for them. In part they are cared for by the state through the agencies of government. To some extent they are cared for by voluntary efforts organized apart from the church. To some extent, at least, they are cared for through ecclesiastical agencies or under ecclesiastical control; and very properly so since the educational, benevolent, and moral ideals of the Christian religion are pitched upon a distinctly higher plane than those of the secular state. The Sunday School and the whole of the recently developed work by and for young people may be classed as specialized religious institutions subordinated to the local church which have made for themselves opportunities to do a work which the churches without them were doing inefficiently or not at all. The Y. M. C. A. is an institution which has been organized on an interdenominational and in international scope. In using these organizations as practical agencies in Christian work it is well not to forget their sociological significance.

Once again and finally, the sociological concept has singularly strong attractions for the Christian because the sublime law of self-sacrifice is common to them both. Can this be a mere co-incidence or is it not rather due to the fact that Christianity is the crowning idea of the

* *Mediæval European History*, J. H. Robinson, preface. *History of Civilization in the Middle Ages*, G. B. Adams, pp. 39-64.

sociological system? Sacrifice is the law of life and progress. Except a seed of corn fall into the ground and die it cannot bring forth. And it may not be the weak and criminal and worthless element which is selected for the sacrifice, but the best. It is the sacrifice of the parent for the child, of the patriot for his country, of the nurse and physician for those stricken by epidemic, of the rescuer for those perishing in fire and flood, of the missionary who sacrifices home life and opportunities for life in the foreign fields, on the frontier, or in the city slums; of the only begotten of the father who died that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life, of him who said: "If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me," and who later prayed: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

The spirit of service permeates the gospel message through and through. "But whosoever would be great among you" let him win the honorable and coveted position by social service; let him "be your minister," "your servant"; therein lies the truest, greatest honor. He that selfishly seeketh after and "findeth his life shall lose it," for it is but as the grass that dieth and counts as nothing when measured by the standards which Jesus sets. "But he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Here as so often Jesus speaks in hyperboles. He that liveth to himself dieth to all that is most worth living for, his life is already wasted and thrown away. He that dieth for Jesus' sake shall be as one who has lived with honor for he hath done that which it is worth one's while, dying, to have accomplished. Elijah was fed by the ravens; John, the Baptist, lived on locusts and wild honey; Jesus was entertained by his friends; Paul boasted that he had supported himself by his own hands, being chargeable to no one. But who would for an instant suggest a comparison between the wages and the services of these men? It is true that the current economic policy which is relied on to stimulate our industrial life is based on the principle that men will be led to prac-

tice thrift by being guaranteed the benefits of their own thriftiness. It is true also that many men look upon the emoluments and the honors as the principal inducements to entering upon the practice of the law or into public service. But this does not change the fact that in theory the function of the lawyer is to be the servant of the court and that the social function of the judge, the governor, and the legislator is to be the servant of the people. It is a misfortune which we have not yet succeeded in eliminating and which we still suffer from that public services are too often done by those who put a higher estimate upon the personal gain than on the social service.

In another field social service is more clearly recognized as the predominant motive. If social service promotes social progress; if social progress is telic, having the improvement of the race and the development of the individual as its aim; and if the moral and religious ideals of Christianity are the noblest and sublimest which the world knows of or can conceive, what shall we say of the social service of the Christian ministry, of those who are devoted to preaching righteousness and serving their fellow men?

These are the considerations which justify us in giving consideration to the sociologist's working hypothesis that the group is the proper unit of social observation and experiment. Is there anything in it irreconcilable with a Christian's faith in God? There are two things in it: facts and inferences from the facts—which we call, according to their credibility, hypotheses, theories, laws, and principles. As to the facts involved they are what the best trained scientific minds using the best methods of investigation determine them to be. As for the inferences from the facts, if any man believes in God and believes that this universe is his handiwork, built and ordered in harmony with his nature, can he refuse to risk the legitimate inferences from the facts of that universe? It is preposterous. If contradictory inferences are paraded let him show that they are based upon imper-

fectly determined or insufficient facts; and let him do his part in postponing the drawing of inferences until they can be drawn with wisdom and not rashly. If the experience of the past teaches anything on this point, it teaches the need of conservative Christian men in checking rash inferences.

The sociologist's working hypothesis is affording results that are helpful and abundant and that with every step strengthen and confirm our confidence in it. I see no reason why the Christian, be he layman or preacher, should not take it for what it purports to be and handle it as such things ought to be handled, ever watching it critically and testing it as he uses it. Let us commend to him as he sets about his work the conception that the individual in whose immortal soul and eternal welfare he is interested is first of all a unit in a group. Whether he shall be sacrificed to the group that it may progress; or be the victim of its inequities; or profit, if he but will, by what the group has to give him, may not at once appear. But his likes and his dislikes, his limitations and capacities, his fears and his aspirations, will be largely those of the group around him. Moreover our interest is not in the individuals of this generation alone; but in improving the group for the sake of the generations to come. Let us therefore give intelligent consideration to the body of social knowledge as it accumulates that we may more intelligently deal with the community and the church with which our lot is cast and may more intelligently handle the individuals whom it may be our lot to serve.