SOCIOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

THE GROUP CONCEPT AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

Sociological thought, dispersed among the various schools, has been absorbed in an effort to define its point of view and describe the sort of facts that may properly be called "sociological." At present it is seeking in some fashion to become an experimental science and to test its theories by facts. Sociological problems may be classified as, (a) problems of organization and administration, (b) problems of policy and polity, legislative problems, (c) problems of human nature, cultural problems. Fundamental problems are cultural, problems of social forces. Social problems. All social problems turn out upon analysis to be problems of social groups. Problems can therefore be further classified with reference to the existing types of social groups. Personality. The individual, so far as he is to be regarded as a person, is a product of group life and must be studied in connection with the social group or groups of which he is a member and within which he has status. Problems of personality, so far as they are social problems in the narrower sense, are problems of status.

VIII. SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

Among the schools which, since Comte and Spencer, have divided sociological thinking between them the realists have, on the whole, maintained the tradition of Comte; the nominalists, on the other hand, have preserved the style and manner, if not the substance, of Spencer's thought. Later writers, however, realist as well as nominalist have directed their attention less to society than to societies, i.e., social groups; they have been less interested in social progress than in social process; more concerned with social problems than with social philosophy.

This change marks the transformation of sociology from a philosophy of history to a science of society. The steps in this transition are periods in the history of the science, that is:

1. The period of Comte and Spencer; sociology, conceived in the grand style, is a philosophy of history, a "science" of progress (evolution).

2. The period of the "schools"; sociological thought, dispersed among the various schools, is absorbed in an effort to define its
point of view and to describe the kinds of facts that sociology must look for to answer the questions that sociology asks.

3. The period of investigation and research, the period into which sociology is just now entering.

Sociological research is at present (1921) in about the situation in which psychology was before the introduction of laboratory methods, in which medicine was before Pasteur and the germ theory of disease. A great deal of social information has been collected merely for the purpose of determining what to do in a given case. Facts have not been collected to check social theories. Social problems have been defined in terms of common sense, and facts have been collected, for the most part, to support this or that doctrine, not to test it. In very few instances have investigations been made, disinterestedly, to determine the validity of a hypothesis.

Charles Booth's studies of poverty in London, which extended over eighteen years and were finally embodied in seventeen volumes, is an example of such a disinterested investigation. It is an attempt to put to the test of fact the popular conception of the relation between wages and welfare. He says:

My object has been to attempt to show the numerical relation which poverty, misery, and depravity bear to regular earnings and comparative comfort, and to describe the general conditions under which each class lives.

If the facts thus stated are of use in helping social reformers to find remedies for the evils which exist, or do anything to prevent the adoption of false remedies, my purpose is answered. It was not my intention to bring forward any suggestions of my own, and if I have ventured here and there, and especially in the concluding chapters, to go beyond my programme, it has been with much hesitation.

With regard to the disadvantages under which the poor labour, and the evils of poverty, there is a great sense of helplessness: the wage earners are helpless to regulate their work and cannot obtain a fair equivalent for the labour they are willing to give; the manufacturer or dealer can only work within the limits of competition; the rich are helpless to relieve want without stimulating its sources. To relieve this helplessness a better stating of the problems involved is the first step. . . . In this direction must be sought the utility of my attempt to analyze the population of a part of London.  

This vast study did, indeed, throw great light, not only upon poverty in London, but upon human nature in general. On the

1 Labour and Life of the People (London, 1889), I, 6-7.
other hand, it raised more questions than it settled and, if it demonstrated anything, it was the necessity, as Booth suggests, for a restatement of the problem.

Sociology seems now, however, in a way to become, in some fashion or other, an experimental science. It will become so as soon as it can state existing problems in such a way that the results in one case will demonstrate what can and should be done in another. Experiments are going on in every field of social life, in industry, in politics, and in religion. In all these fields men are guided by some implicit or explicit theory of the situation, but this theory is not often stated in the form of a hypothesis and subjected to a test of the negative instances. We have, if it is permitted to make a distinction between them, investigation rather than research.

What, then, in the sense in which the expression is here used, is social research? A classification of problems will be a sort of first aid in the search for an answer.

1. Classification of social problems.—Every society and every social group, capable of consistent action, may be regarded as an organization of the wishes of its members. This means that society rests on, and embodies, the appetites and natural desires of the individual man; but it implies, also, that wishes, in becoming organized, are necessarily disciplined and controlled in the interest of the group as a whole.

Every such society or social group, even the most ephemeral, will ordinarily have (a) some relatively formal method of defining its aim and formulating its policies, making them explicit, and (b) some machinery, functionary, or other arrangement for realizing its aim and carrying its policies into effect. Even in the family there is government, and this involves something that corresponds to legislation, adjudication, and administration.

Social groups, however, maintain their organizations, agencies, and all formal methods of behavior on a basis and in a setting of instinct, of habit, and of tradition which we call human nature. Every social group has, or tends to have, its own culture, what Sumner calls "folkways," and this culture, imposing its patterns upon the natural man, gives him that particular individuality
which characterizes the members of groups. Not races merely but
nationalities and classes have marks, manners, and patterns of life
by which we infallibly recognize and classify them.

Social problems may be conveniently classified with reference
to these three aspects of group life, that is to say, problems of (a)
organization and administration, (b) policy and polity (legislation),
and (c) human nature (culture).

a) Administrative problems are mainly practical and technical.
Most problems of government, of business and social welfare are
technical. The investigations, i.e., social surveys, made in different
parts of the country by the Bureau of Municipal Research of New
York City, are studies of local administration made primarily for
the purpose of improving the efficiency of an existing administrative
machine and its personnel rather than of changing the policy or
purpose of the administration itself.

b) Problems of policy, in the sense in which that term is used
here, are political and legislative. Most social investigations in
recent years have been made in the interest of some legislative
program or for the purpose of creating a more intelligent public
opinion in regard to certain local problems. The social surveys
conducted by the Sage Foundation, as distinguished from those
carried out by the New York Bureau of Municipal Research, have
been concerned with problems of policy, i.e., with changing the
character and policy of social institutions rather than improving
their efficiency. This distinction between administration and
policy is not always clear, but it is always important. Attempts
at reform usually begin with an effort to correct administrative
abuses, but eventually it turns out that reforms must go deeper
and change the character of the institutions themselves.

c) Problems of human nature are naturally fundamental to
all other social problems. Human nature, as we have begun to
conceive it in recent years, is largely a product of social intercourse;
it is, therefore, quite as much as society itself, a subject for socio-
logical investigation. Until recent years, what we are now calling
the human factor has been notoriously neglected in most social
experiments. We have been seeking to reform human nature
while at the same time we refused to reckon with it. It has been
assumed that we could bring about social changes by merely formulating our wishes, that is, by “arousing” public opinion and formulating legislation. This is the “democratic” method of effecting reforms. The older “autocratic” method merely decreed social changes upon the authority of the monarch or the ruling class. What reconciled men to it was that, like Christian Science, it frequently worked.

The oldest but most persistent form of social technique is that of “ordering-and-forbidding”—that is, meeting a crisis by an arbitrary act of will decreeing the disappearance of the undesirable or the appearance of the desirable phenomena, and the using arbitrary physical action to enforce the decree. This method corresponds exactly to the magical phase of natural technique. In both, the essential means of bringing a determined effect is more or less consciously thought to reside in the act of will itself by which the effect is decreed as desirable and of which the action is merely an indispensable vehicle or instrument; in both, the process by which the cause (act of will and physical action) is supposed to bring its effect to realization remains out of reach of investigation; in both, finally, if the result is not attained, some new act of will with new material accessories is introduced, instead of trying to find and remove the perturbing causes. A good instance of this in the social field is the typical legislative procedure of today.¹

2. Types of social group.—The varied interests, fields of investigation, and practical programs which find at present a place within the limits of the sociological discipline are united in having one common object of reference, namely the concept of the social group. All social problems turn out finally to be problems of group life, although each group and each type of group has its own distinctive problems. Illustrations may be gathered from the most widely separated fields to emphasize the truth of this assertion.²

Religious conversion may be interpreted from one point of view as a change from one social group to another. To use the language of religious sentiment, the convert “comes out of a life of sin and enters into a life of grace.” To be sure, this change involves profound disturbances of the personality, but permanence

¹ Thomas and Znaniecki, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (Boston, 1918), I, 3.
of the change in the individual is assured by the breaking up of the old and the establishment of new associations. So the process by which the immigrant makes the transition from the old country to the new involves profound changes in thought and habit. In his case the change is likely to take place slowly, but it is not less radical on that account.

The following paragraph from a recent social survey illustrates, from a quite different point of view, the manner in which the group is involved in changes in community life.

In short, the greatest problem for the next few years in Stillwater is the development of a *community consciousness*. We must stop thinking in terms of city of Stillwater, and country outside of Stillwater, and think in terms of *Stillwater Community*. We must stop thinking in terms of small groups and think in terms of the entire community, no matter whether it is industry, health, education, recreation or religion. Anything which is good will benefit the entire community. Any weakness will be harmful to all. Community co-operation in all lines indicated in this report will make this, indeed, the Queen of the St. Croix.\(^1\)

In this case the solution of the community problem was the creation of "community consciousness." In the case of the professional criminal the character of the problem is determined, if we accept the description of a writer in the *Atlantic Monthly*, by the existence among professional criminals of a primary group consciousness:

The professional criminal is peculiar in the sense that he lives a very intense emotional life. He is isolated in the community. He is in it, but not of it. His social life—for all men are social—is narrow; but just because it is narrow, it is extremely tense. He lives a life of warfare and has the psychology of the warrior. He is at war with the whole community. Except his very few friends in crime he trusts no one and fears everyone. Suspicion, fear, hatred, danger, desperation and passion are present in a more tense form in his life than in that of the average individual. He is restless, ill-humored, easily roused and suspicious. He lives on the brink of a deep precipice. This helps to explain his passionate hatred, his brutality, his fear, and gives poignant significance to the adage that dead men tell no tales. He holds on to his few friends with a strength and passion rare among people who live a more normal existence. His friends stand between him and discovery. They are his hold upon life, his basis of security.

\(^1\) *Stillwater, the Queen of the St. Croix*, a report of a social survey, published by The Community Service of Stillwater, Minnesota, 1920, p. 71.
Loyalty to one's group is the basic law in the underworld. Disloyalty is treason and punishable by death; for disloyalty may mean the destruction of one's friends; it may mean the hurling of the criminal over the precipice on which his whole life is built.

To the community the criminal is aggressive. To the criminal his life is one of defense primarily. The greater part of his energy, of his hopes, and of his successes, centres around escapes, around successful flight, around proper covering-up of his tracks, and around having good, loyal, and trustworthy friends to participate in his activities, who will tell no tales and keep the rest of the community outside. The criminal is thus, from his own point of view—and I am speaking of professional criminals—living a life of defensive warfare with the community; and the odds are heavy against him. He therefore builds up a defensive psychology against it—a psychology of boldness, bravado, and self-justification. The good criminal—which means the successful one, he who has most successfully carried through a series of depredations against the enemy, the common enemy, the public—is a hero. He is recognized as such, toasted and feasted, trusted and obeyed. But always by a little group. They live in a world of their own, a life of their own, with ideals, habits, outlook, beliefs, and associations which are peculiarly fitted to maintain the morale of the group. Loyalty, fearlessness, generosity, willingness to sacrifice one's self, perseverance in the face of prosecution, hatred of the common enemy—these are the elements that maintain the morale, but all of them are pointed against the community as a whole.¹

The manner in which the principle of the primary group was applied at Sing Sing in dealing with the criminal within the prison walls is a still more interesting illustration of the fact that social problems are group problems.²

Assuming, then, that every social group may be presumed to have its own (a) administrative, (b) legislative, and (c) human-nature problems, these problems may be still further classified with reference to the type of social group. Most social groups fall naturally into one or the other of the following classes:

a) The family.

b) Language (racial) groups.

c) Local and territorial communities: (i) neighborhoods, (ii) rural communities, (iii) urban communities.

d) Conflict groups: (i) nationalities, (ii) parties, (iii) sects, (iv) labor organizations, (v) gangs, etc.


² Ibid., pp. 443–46.
e) Accommodation groups: (i) classes, (ii) castes, (iii) vocational, (iv) denominational groups.

The foregoing classification is not quite adequate nor wholly logical. The first three classes are more closely related to one another than they are to the last two, i.e., the so-called "accommodation" and "conflict" groups. The distinction is far-reaching, but its general character is indicated by the fact that the family, language, and local groups are, or were originally, what are known as primary groups, that is, groups organized on intimate, face-to-face relations. The conflict and accommodation groups represent divisions which may, to be sure, have arisen within the primary group, but which have usually arisen historically by the imposition of one primary group upon another.

Every state in history was or is a *state of classes*, a polity of superior and inferior social groups, based upon distinctions either of rank or of property. This phenomenon must, then, be called the "State."

It is the existence at any rate of conflict and accommodation within the limits of a larger group which distinguishes it from groups based on primary relations, and gives it eventually the character described as "secondary."

When a language group becomes militant and self-conscious, it assumes the character of a nationality. It is perhaps true, also, that the family which is large enough and independent to be self-conscious, by that fact assumes the character of a clan. Important in this connection is the fact that a group in becoming group-conscious changes its character. External conflict has invariably reacted powerfully upon the internal organization of social groups.

Group self-consciousness seems to be a common characteristic of conflict and accommodation groups and distinguishes them from the more elementary forms of society represented by the family and the local community.

3. *Organisation and structure of social groups.*—Having a general scheme for the classification of social groups, it is in order to discover methods of analysis that are applicable to the study of all types of groups, from the family to the sect. Such a scheme

of analysis should reveal not only the organization and structure of typical groups, but it should indicate the relation of this organization and structure to those social problems that are actual and generally recognized. The sort of facts which are now generally recognized as important in the study, not merely of society, but the problems of society, are:

a) Statistics: numbers, local distribution, mobility, incidence of births, deaths, disease, and crime.

b) Institutions: local distribution, classification (i.e., (i) industrial, (ii) religious, (iii) political, (iv) educational, (v) welfare and mutual aid), communal organization.

c) Heritages: the customs and traditions transmitted by the group, particularly in relation to religion, recreation and leisure time, and social control (politics).


4. Social process and social progress.—Social process is the name for all changes which can be regarded as changes in the life of the group. A group may be said to have a life when it has a history. Among social processes we may distinguish (a) the historical, (b) the cultural, (c) the political, and (d) the economic.

a) We describe as historical the processes by which the fund of social tradition, which is the heritage of every permanent social group, is accumulated and transmitted from one generation to another.

History plays the rôle in the group of memory in the individual. Without history social groups would, no doubt, rise and decline, but they would neither grow old nor make progress.

Immigrants, crossing the ocean, leave behind them much of their local traditions. The result is that they lose, particularly in the second generation, that control which the family and group tradition formerly exercised over them; but they are, for that very reason, all the more open to the influence of the traditions and customs of their adopted country.

b) If it is the function of the historical process to accumulate and conserve the common fund of social experience, it is the function of the cultural process to shape and define the social forms
and the social patterns which each preceding generation imposes upon its successors.

The individual living in society has to fit into a pre-existing social world, to take part in the hedonistic, economic, political, religious, moral, aesthetic, intellectual activities of the group. For these activities the group has objective systems, more or less complex sets of schemes, organized either by traditional association or with a conscious regard to the greatest possible efficiency of the result, but with only a secondary, or even with no interest in the particular desires, abilities and experiences of the individuals who have to perform these activities.

There is no pre-existing harmony whatever between the individual and the social factors of personal evolution, and the fundamental tendencies of the individual are always in some disaccordance with the fundamental tendencies of social control. Personal evolution is always a struggle between the individual and society—a struggle for self-expression on the part of the individual, for his subjection on the part of society—and it is in the total course of this struggle that the personality—not as a static "essence" but as a dynamic, continually evolving set of activities—manifests and constructs itself.¹

c) In general, standards of behavior that are in the mores are not the subject of discussion, except so far as discussion is necessary to determine whether this or that act falls under one or the other of the accepted social sanctions. The political as distinguished from the cultural process is concerned with just those matters in regard to which there is division and difference. Politics is concerned with issues.

The negro, particularly in the southern states, is a constant theme of popular discussion. Every time a negro finds himself in a new situation, or one in which the white population is unaccustomed to see him, the thing provokes comment in both races. On the other hand, when a southerner asks the question: "Would you want your daughter to marry a negro?" it is time for discussion to cease. Any questions of relations between the races can always be immediately disposed of as soon as it is seen to come, directly or indirectly, under the intolerable formula. Political questions are matters of compromise and expediency. Miscegenation, on the other hand, is contrary to the mores. As such the rule against it is absolute.

¹ Thomas and Znaniecki, op. cit., III, 34–36.
The political process, by which a society or social group formulates its wishes and enforces them, goes on within the limits of the mores and is carried on by public discussion, legislation, and the adjudication of the courts.

d.) The economic process, so far as it can be distinguished from the production and distribution of goods, is the process by which prices are made and an exchange of values is effected. Most values, i.e., my present social status, my hopes of the future, and memory of the past, are personal and not values that can be exchanged. The economic process is concerned with values that can be treated as commodities.

Fig. 2.—a = area of most extended cultural influences and of commerce; b = area of formal political control; c = area of purely personal relationships, communism.

All these processes may, and do, arise within most but not every society or social group. Commerce presupposes the freedom of the individual to pursue his own profit, and commerce can take place only to the extent and degree that this freedom is permitted. Freedom of commerce is, however, limited on the one hand by the mores and on the other by formal law, so that the economic process takes place ordinarily within limitations that are defined by the cultural and the political processes. It is only where there is neither a cultural nor a political order that commerce is absolutely free.

The areas of (1) the cultural, (2) the political, (3) the economic processes and their relations to one another may be represented by concentric circles.
In this representation the area of widest cultural influences is coterminous with the area of commerce, because commerce in its widest extension is invariably carried on under some restraints of custom and customary law. Otherwise it is not commerce at all, but something predacious outside the law. But if the area of the economic process is almost invariably coterminous with the widest areas of cultural influence, it does not extend to the smaller social groups. As a rule trade does not invade the family. Family interests are always personal even when they are carried on under the forms of commerce. Primitive society, within the limits of the village, is usually communistic. All values are personal, and the relations of individuals to one another, economic or otherwise, are preordained by custom and law.

The impersonal values, values for exchange, seem to be in any given society or social group in inverse relation to the personal values.

The attempt to describe in this large way the historical, cultural, political, and economic processes, is justified in so far as it enables us to recognize that the aspects of social life, which are the subject-matter of the special social sciences, i.e., history, political science, and economics, are involved in specific forms of change that can be viewed abstractly, formulated, compared, and related. The attempt to view them in their interrelations is at the same time an effort to distinguish and to see them as parts of one whole.

In contrast with the types of social change referred to there are other changes which are unilateral and progressive; changes which are described popularly as “movements,” mass movements. These are changes which eventuate in new social organizations and institutions.

All more marked forms of social change are associated with certain social manifestations that we call social unrest. Social unrest issues, under ordinary conditions, as an incident of new social contacts, and is an indication of a more lively tempo in the process of communication and interaction.

All social changes are preceded by a certain degree of social and individual disorganization. This will be followed ordinarily under normal conditions by a movement of reorganization. All
progress implies a certain amount of disorganization. In studying social changes, therefore, that, if not progressive, are at least unilateral, we are interested in:

a. Disorganization: accelerated mobility, unrest, disease, and crime as manifestations and measures of social disorganization.

b. Social movements (reorganization) include: (i) crowd movements (i.e., mobs, strikes, etc.); (ii) cultural revivals, religious and linguistic; (iii) fashion (changes in dress, convention, and social ritual); (iv) reform (changes in social policy and administration); (v) revolutions (changes in institutions and the mores).

5. The individual and the person.—The person is an individual who has status. We come into the world as individuals. We acquire status, and become persons. Status means position in society. The individual inevitably has some status in every social group of which he is a member. In a given group the status of every member is determined by his relation to every other member of that group. Every smaller group, likewise, has a status in some larger group of which it is a part and this is determined by its relation to all the other members of the larger group.

The individual's self-consciousness—his conception of his rôle in society, his "self," in short—while not identical with his personality is an essential element in it. The individual's conception of himself, however, is based on his status in the social group or groups of which he is a member. The individual whose conception of himself does not conform to his status is an isolated individual. The completely isolated individual, whose conception of himself is in no sense an adequate reflection of his status, is probably insane.

It follows from what is said that an individual may have many "selves" according to the groups to which he belongs and the extent to which each of these groups is isolated from the others. It is true, also, that the individual is influenced in differing degrees and in a specific manner, by the different types of group of which he is a member. This indicates the manner in which the personality of the individual may be studied sociologically.

Every individual comes into the world in possession of certain characteristics and relatively fixed behavior patterns which we call instincts. This is his racial inheritance which he shares with all
members of the species. He comes into the world, also, endowed with certain undefined capacities for learning other forms of behavior, capacities which vary greatly in different individuals. These individual differences and the instincts are what is called original nature.¹

Sociology is interested in "original nature" in so far as it supplies the raw materials out of which individual personalities and the social order are created. Both society and the persons who compose society are the products of social processes working in and through the materials which each new generation of men contributes to it.

Charles Cooley, who was the first to make the important distinction between primary and secondary groups, has pointed out that the intimate, face-to-face associations of primary groups i.e., the family, the neighborhood, and the village community, are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual.²

There is, however, an area of life in which the associations are more intimate than those of the primary group as that group is ordinarily conceived. Such are the relations between mother and child, particularly in the period of infancy, and the relations between men and women under the influence of the sexual instinct. These are the associations in which the most lasting affections and the most violent antipathies are formed. We may describe it as the area of touch relationships.

Finally, there is the area of secondary contacts, in which relationships are relatively impersonal, formal, and conventional. It is in this region of social life that the individual gains, at the same time, a personal freedom and an opportunity for distinction that is denied him in the primary group.

As a matter of fact, many, if not most, of our present social problems have their source and origin in the transition of great masses of the population—the immigrants, for example—out of a

¹ Original nature in its relation to social welfare and human progress has been made the subject-matter of a special science, eugenics. For a criticism of the claims of eugenics as a social science see Leonard T. Hobhouse, Social Evolution and Political Theory (Columbia University Press, 1917).

² Charles H. Cooley, Social Organization, p. 28.
society based on primary group relationships into the looser, freer, and less controlled existence of life in great cities.

The "moral unrest" so deeply penetrating all western societies, the growing vagueness and indecision of personalities, the almost complete disappearance of the "strong and steady character" of old times, in short, the rapid and general increase of Bohemianism and Bolshevism in all societies, is an effect of the fact that not only the early primary group controlling all interests of its members on the general social basis, not only the occupational group of the mediaeval type controlling most of the interests of its members on a professional basis, but even the special modern group dividing with many others the task of organizing permanently the attitudes of each of its members, is more and more losing ground. The pace of social evolution has become so rapid that special groups are ceasing to be permanent and stable enough to organize and maintain organized complexes of attitudes of their members which correspond to their common pursuits. In other words, society is gradually losing all its old machinery for the determination and stabilization of individual characters.¹

Every social group tends to create, from the individuals that compose it, its own type of character, and the characters thus formed become component parts of the social structure in which they are incorporated. All the problems of social life are thus problems of the individual; and all problems of the individual are at the same time problems of the group. This point of view is already recognized in preventive medicine, and to some extent in psychiatry. It is not yet adequately recognized in the technique of social case work.

Further advance in the application of social principles to social practice awaits a more thoroughgoing study of the problems, systematic social research, and an experimental social science.

¹ Thomas and Znaniecki, op. cit., III, 63-64.