

SOCIOLOGY AND MODERN SOCIAL PROBLEMS

BY
CHARLES A. ELLWOOD, PH.D.

Professor of Sociology, University of Missouri
Author of "Sociology in its Psychological Aspects," "Introduction to
Social Psychology," "The Social Problem."

NEW EDITION

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PREFACE FOR TEACHERS

THIS book was originally written as an elementary text in sociology for use in high schools, colleges, and reading circles where it is desired to combine the study of sociology with a study of current social problems on the one hand, and to correlate it with a course in economics on the other. The generous reception and wide use which the book has enjoyed since its publication seem to indicate that there is a demand for a simple, concrete text in sociology in which methodological discussions are reduced to a minimum and the facts are drawn as far as possible from contemporary social life.

The original plan of the book has not been departed from; but when the Federal Census of 1910 necessitated extensive alterations in the book, the opportunity was taken to give it a somewhat thorough revision. Not only were statistics brought down to date wherever possible, but upon the advice of teachers using the book as a text, considerable new material was incorporated. Two entirely new chapters, one on "The Bearing of Modern Psychology upon Social Problems," and the other a "Theoretical Summary," were added. It is hoped that these will aid in bringing out more clearly the theoretical implications of the concrete problems studied; but as noted in the text, they may be omitted in brief courses of study, such as those of reading circles. No chapter was added on the development of economic institutions, as several had suggested, since it is intended that the study of this

text should be accompanied, or followed, by a study of economics.

Again after the Great War, the book has been revised and enlarged without altering its plan and organization. The purpose of this revision has been to relate the text to the problems of reconstruction now confronting the nation, to bring statistics down to date so far as possible, and to revise the lists of supplementary readings. Thus as in earlier editions those who wish to do wider reading on the problems treated in this text will find a series of suitable references at the end of each chapter. The first reference mentioned under the heading "For brief reading" is especially commended to those who can lay out but a brief course of parallel readings.

The fundamental method of the book has not been changed. The book aims to illustrate the working of the chief factors in social organization and evolution, and so the elementary principles of sociology, by the study of concrete problems, especially through the study of the origin, development, structure, and functions of the family considered as a typical human institution. In spite of some criticism, I have, therefore, continued to make large use of the family as the simplest and, in many ways, the most typical form of human association to illustrate sociological principles. I am firmly convinced, after more than a dozen years of experience in teaching sociology to underclassmen, that this is a sound method. One might say, indeed, that the study of the family is to sociology what the study of the cell, or cytology, is to biology, if one were not afraid of being accused of employing the organic analogy! While there are many things in human association which the student cannot perceive through the study of

the family, yet it does reveal in a most unmistakable way all of the fundamental biological and psychological factors in the social life. I would especially commend the study of the history of individual families through several generations as a form of sociological investigation, suited to elementary students, which will bring out clearly the biological and psychological forces shaping our social life. This method, now employed so extensively by students of eugenics, is capable of indefinite expansion on the psychological side, if attention is paid to the interests, ideals, and traditions of individual families. The making of such family monographs, together with the making of one or more community surveys, might, indeed, well be made the necessary laboratory or field work in an elementary course of sociology.

To bring out the factors and principles of the social life not illustrated by the family, a number of other concrete social problems are studied. These have been selected to illustrate the more important remaining sociological principles. They have also been selected mainly from contemporary American society, not merely because it is "practical" to do so, but also because the United States affords the greatest sociological laboratory, for American students at least, that can possibly be found. How foolish it would be for American students of sociology to shut themselves up to the uncertain material afforded by cultural anthropology and ethnology when they have such a wealth of concrete sociological data all about them! For the elementary student, at any rate, there can be no doubt as to the wisdom of approaching sociological principles through the study of the concrete problems of the contemporary social life with which he is familiar, rather than through

the study of some hypothetically reconstructed primitive society. While all scientific methods should be used by the sociologist, the observation, description, and statistical study of contemporary society are surely the most important for the beginner.

I wish again to express my indebtedness in the preparation of this book to my former teachers, especially to Professor Willcox of Cornell University and to Professors Small and Henderson of the University of Chicago. Much of the substance and method of this book was derived from their instruction. My main sources are also indicated in the lists of references.

CHARLES A. ELLWOOD.

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SOCIOLOGY AND MODERN SOCIAL PROBLEMS

CHAPTER I

THE STUDY OF SOCIETY

What is Society? — Perhaps the great question which sociology seeks to answer may be this question which we have put at the beginning. Just as biology seeks to answer the question "What is life?"; zoölogy, "What is an animal?"; botany, "What is a plant?"; so sociology seeks to answer the question "What is society?" But just as biology, zoölogy, and botany cannot answer their questions until those sciences have reached their complete development, so also sociology cannot fully answer the question "What is society?" until it reaches its final development. Nevertheless, some conception or definition of society is necessary for the beginner; for in the scientific discussion of any problem we must know first of all what we are talking about. Before we can study the social problems of to-day from a sociological point of view, then, we must understand in a general way what society is, what sociology is, and what the relations are between sociology and other sciences.

The word "society" is used popularly to designate a variety of more or less permanent human groups. A word used scientifically, however, must be given a definite mean-

ing corresponding to observed facts. Now we observe in the first place that collective or group life is not peculiar to man, but characterizes many animals and plants as well. Mere collective or group life, however, is not in itself social life. A clump of grasses, a forest of trees, a colony of bacteria, or a group of protozoa may show interdependence in the life activities of their separate units, but we do not usually call them "societies," because, so far as we know, their individuals do not have conscious relations. Such groups of lowly organisms do, however, show the first mark of social life in that they carry on certain life activities in common. But interdependence in life activities constitutes what we call "comradeship" or "society" only when it reaches the conscious or mental plane.

The second mark of social life, accordingly, is the existence of conscious relations among the members of a group. The group life is carried on by means of mental interactions; that is, the interdependence in life activities is more or less guided and controlled by conscious processes. Using the term in a concrete sense, then, we may say that *a society is any group of individuals who carry on a common life by means of conscious relations*. We say "conscious relations," because it is not necessary that these relations be specialized into imitative or sympathetic, economic or political relations to make society or social life. Society is constituted by the mental interaction of individuals and exists wherever two or more individuals have reciprocal conscious relations to each other. Dependence upon a common economic environment, or mere contiguity in space, on the other hand, is not sufficient to constitute society. It is mental interdependence, the contact and

overlapping of our inner selves, which makes possible that form of collective life which we call "society." Groups of plants do not constitute true societies unless it can be shown that they have some degree of mental life. On the other hand, there is no reason for withholding the term society from many animal groups. These animal societies, however, are very different in many respects from human society, and are of interest to us only as certain of their forms throw light upon human society.

Certain faulty conceptions of society are prevalent, against which the beginner must be warned. In the writings of European sociologists the word society is often used as nearly synonymous with the state or nation. Now the state or nation is a group of people politically organized into an independent government, and it is only one of many forms of human society. To identify society with the state leads to many errors, both in theory and in practice. Another conception of society would make it synonymous with the cultural group or civilization. A society, according to this conception, is any group of people that have a common civilization, or that are bearers of a certain type of culture. Christendom, for example, would constitute a society. But cultural groups again are only one form of human society. Nations and civilizations are very imposing forms of human society, and hence they have attracted the attention of social thinkers in the past to the neglect of the more humble forms.

Any form of association, or social group, if studied from the point of view of organization and development, whether it be a family, a neighborhood group, a city, a nation, a party, or a trade union, will serve to reveal many of the

problems of sociology. All forms of association are of interest to the sociologist, though not all are of equal importance. The natural, genetic social groups, which we may call "communities," serve best to exhibit sociological problems. Through the study of such simple and primary groups as the family and the neighborhood group, for example, the problems of sociology can be much better attacked than through the study of society at large or association in general. In this text we shall take the family as the simplest and in many ways the most typical form of human association, to illustrate concretely the laws and principles of social organization and development in general.

From what has been said it may be inferred that *society* as a scientific term is nearly synonymous with the abstract term *association*, and this is correct. Association, indeed, may be regarded as the more scientific term of the two; at any rate it indicates more exactly what the sociologist deals with. A word may be said also as to the meaning of the word *social*. The sense in which this word will generally be used in this text is that of a collective adjective, referring to all that pertains to or relates to society in any way. The word social is much broader than the words industrial, political, moral, religious, and embraces them all; that is, *social phenomena are all phenomena which involve the interaction of two or more individuals.*

Phases of Social Life. — Social life in its broadest sense, as we have seen, includes the group life of the animals below man. Social evolution begins with animal association. But the social life of man has developed many complex phases not shown by animal social life, such as industry, art, government, science, education, morality, and religion.

Collectively these are known as "culture" (which is the scientific term for civilization in the broadest sense); and the development of culture is what distinguishes the social life of man from the social life of brutes. On account of the importance of these various phases of culture in human social life many thinkers have made the mistake of attempting to explain social organization and evolution through these. It has been especially popular of late to attempt to interpret the social life of man through his industrial life. But industry, art, government, morality, religion, and all other phases of civilization are *products* of the social life of man. Beneath them lies the biological and psychological fact of association. This is equivalent to saying that industry, government, morality, religion, and the like, in order to be understood, must be viewed from the social standpoint and interpreted as products of man's social life rather than *vice versa*.

It should be added that the individual and society are correlatives. We have no knowledge of individuals apart from society or society apart from individuals. What we do know is that human life everywhere is a collective or associated life, the individual being on the one hand largely an expression of the social life surrounding him and on the other hand society being largely an expression of individual character. The reasons for all these assertions will appear as we develop our subject.

What is Sociology? — The science which deals with human association, its origin, development, forms, and functions, is sociology. Briefly, sociology is a science which deals with society as a whole and not with its separate aspects or phases. It attempts to formulate the laws or

principles which govern social organization and social evolution. This means that the main problems of sociology are those of the organization of society on the one hand and the evolution of society on the other. These words, *organization* and *evolution*, however, are used in a broader sense in sociology than they are generally used. By organization we mean any relation of the parts of society to each other. By evolution we mean, not necessarily change for the better, but orderly change of any sort. Sociology is, therefore, a science which deals with the laws or principles of social organization and of social change. Put in more exact terms, this makes sociology *the science of the origin, development, structure, and functioning of social groups*.

Certain faulty conceptions of sociology have greatly impeded its progress as a science. We must not conceive of sociology, for example, as an encyclopedic science of all social phenomena; for there are manifestly other sciences of social phenomena, such as economics and politics. Again, it is wrong to conceive of sociology as the science of human institutions; for there are other sciences dealing with human institutions and, besides, the non-institutional activities of our social life are scarcely less important sociologically than the institutional. Finally, it is extremely inadequate to conceive of sociology as a study of social evils and their remedies. The development of sociology is indispensable for the correction of social evils, for the elimination of social maladjustments; but it must study primarily the laws of normal social organization and evolution rather than the abnormal elements in our social life; for the abnormal is an incident, a faulty development, within the normal. By understanding the laws of social

normality, however, we may be able to correct the abnormal.

The distinction between the sciences, however, is one of problems. Thus by understanding what the problems of sociology are, we shall be able to understand its relations to other sciences.

The Problems of Sociology. — The problems of sociology fall into two great classes: first, problems of the organization of society; second, problems of the evolution of society. The problems of the organization of society are problems of the relations of individuals to one another and to institutions. They include not only problems of group structure, but also problems of group functioning. Such are, for example, problems of group unity, and so of national unity; or again, of the influence of various factors in physical nature or in the human mind upon social organization. These problems may be considered as problems of society in a hypothetically stationary condition, or at rest. For this reason Auguste Comte, the founder of modern sociology, called the division of sociology which deals with such problems *Social Statics*.

But the problems which are of the most interest and importance in sociology are those of social evolution. Under this head come all problems of social origins and of social change. Especially important practically among these are the problems of social progress and of social retrogression; that is, the causes of the advance of communities, nations, and civilizations to higher types of social life, and the causes of social decline. The former problem, social progress, is in a peculiar sense the central problem of sociology. The effort of theoretical sociology is to develop a

scientific theory of social progress. The study of social evolution, then, that is, of social changes of all sorts, as we have emphasized above, is the vital part of sociology; and it is manifest that only a general science of society like sociology is competent to deal with such a problem. Inasmuch as the problems of social evolution are problems of change, development, or movement in society, Comte proposed that this division of sociology be called *Social Dynamics*.

The Relations of Sociology to Other Sciences.¹ — (A) *Relations to Biology and Psychology*. In attempting to give a scientific view of social organization and social evolution, sociology has to depend upon the other natural sciences, particularly upon biology and psychology. It is manifest that sociology must depend upon biology, since biology is the general science of life, and human society is but part of the world of life in general. It is manifest also that sociology must depend upon psychology to explain the interactions between individuals, because these interactions are for the most part interactions between their minds. Thus on the one hand all social phenomena are vital phenomena and on the other hand nearly all social phenomena are on the mental plane. Every social problem has, in other words, its psychological and its biological sides, and sociology is distinguished from biology and psychology only as a matter of convenience. The scientific division of labor necessitates that certain scientific workers concern themselves with certain problems. Now, the problems with

¹ For a fuller discussion of the relations of sociology to other sciences, see my advanced texts, *Sociology in its Psychological Aspects* and *Introduction to Social Psychology* (published by D. Appleton & Co.).