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Foundations of Sociology

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OF
ECONOMICS, POLITICS, AND
SOCIOLOGY

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FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIOLOGY



TO MY HONORED COLLEAGUE
PROFESSOR GEORGE ELLIOTT HOWARD

EQUALLY RENOWNED FOR
THE EMINENCE OF HIS SCHOLARSHIP
AND THE LOFTINESS OF HIS CHARACTER

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

PREFACE

To the student of society present themselves the questions, *What is? What has been? What tends to be? What may be?* The first calls for descriptive sociology; the second evokes historical sociology; the third summons into being theoretical sociology; the fourth is a demand for practical sociology. In a way, however, the first two are tributary to the third. Laws and generalizations are the coveted treasure of those who know, and therefore the inquiry which establishes *what tends to be* yields the sociology that ranks with such sciences as biology and psychology.

We seek truth not merely for the pleasure of knowing, but in order to have a lamp for our feet. We toil at building sound theory in order that we may know what to do and what to avoid. Hence all the labors of social investigators finally empty into practical sociology. This branch first frames a worthy and realizable ideal and then, availing itself of theoretical sociology, indicates what measures will so take advantage of the trend of things as to transmute the actual into the ideal. The goal set up may be a far-off social Utopia; but again it may be nothing more radical than the stamping out of alcoholism, the suppression of war, or the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men. Society is to be led toward the goal along routes intelligently laid out

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with due regard to human nature and to the obscure tendencies that lurk in the social deeps.

Whether we like it or not men are becoming conscious of their social existence. It is no longer possible for them to take their institutions in the naïve, unconscious way of barbarians. Looking across frontiers and centuries they come to know too much about the practice of other times and peoples to preserve an unshaken confidence in an institution they cannot rationally justify. If to-day a people clings to its own type of family or school or criminal code when they are put to the question, it does so on assignable grounds; and if it gives them up, it will renounce them for explicit reasons. Now that every social arrangement, however venerable, is required to submit its credentials, the demand for a valid sociology must grow. The iconoclast who attacks an institution in the name of a certain theory of society is met by a conservative who withstands him in the name of another theory of society.

The solution of the larger social problems demands not only special data but also the light of general principles. The heaping together of all the pertinent facts does not equip us to deal successfully with the drink problem, the woman question, race friction or the factory labor of children. We need to know the sympathetic connections that bind the phenomena we are dealing with to other masses of social fact. We must have, moreover, some notion of what has been and what tends to be in this particular sphere of social life, lest we waste our strength in vainly

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trying to dam a stream of tendency we might be able to guide. Not unpractical, then, are those who withdraw a little from the perplexities of the hour in order to work out a body of general social theory. They are like the irrigator who diverts the water farther up stream and loses a season in building a longer canal, in order at last to lead an ampler flow upon a wider tract.

It will be long before sociology becomes so exact that it can affirm of a policy "*This is scientific; consider no other!*" What we may reasonably hope for is that, as the laws of social phenomena come to light, many extreme proposals will be barred from consideration and the intelligent public will center its attention upon a smaller number of policies. Thus we already begin to see autocracy and anarchy eliminated as projects of government and sacrament and contract shut out as theories of the marriage relation. The growth of sociology is likely to confine within ever narrower limits and focus upon an ever smaller number of measures the discussions relating to family, property, association, education, crime, pauperism, colonization, migration, class relations, race relations, war, and government.

An authoritative body of social theory exists at present as aspiration rather than fact. In this volume the writer has ventured on little beyond the laying of foundations. The erection upon them of an enduring superstructure is a task for the future.

EDWARD ALSWORTH ROSS.

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**FOUNDATIONS OF
SOCIOLOGY**

FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

I

THE SCOPE AND TASK OF SOCIOLOGY¹

We are told that the subject-matter of sociology is the social aggregate. But what is meant by the social aggregate? Where does it begin, where end? Is it humanity, the race, the nation, the community, the class, or the voluntary association? "Study the social organism," they bid us, but nowhere do we perceive a social body complete in itself, with head and members, periphery and viscera. We see extending everywhere a web of human beings, woven now close, now loose; binding men together sometimes with many threads, sometimes with few; uniting them at times directly, oftener indirectly, through other men, or through centers of attachment such as common interests, ideals, or institutions. Where in this continuous tissue shall we find a social cadaver to dissect?

In another quarter it is held that sociology is concerned only with the action of human groups on one another—social phenomena—and the influence of the group on its individual members—psycho-social

¹*Vide The American Journal of Sociology*, May, 1903.

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phenomena. According to Gumpłowicz¹ and Bauer,² not social wholes, but the hundred interlacing groups into which men combine, are the proper subject of study. This, no doubt, is an enticing conception, for it excuses us from showing how groups form and how a group-type or a group-will arises out of the play of mind on mind. It is not clear, however, that the sociologist may ignore the genesis of the group any more than the biologist may ignore the genesis of the organism. Then, too, quite aside from the group, there are man-to-man relations, which are well worth studying. How the social mystery begins to clear when we have made out such typical relations as those between model and imitator, apostle and disciple, leader and follower, between two dissentients, two competitors, or two comrades! Yet such a couple is not a group any more than a molecule of two atoms is a body or a binary star is a solar system.

Most helpful is Simmel's notion³ that the true matter of sociology is not the groups themselves, but the *modes* or *forms* of association into groups. In bodies the most diverse—a church or a guild, a trust or an art league—may be found identical modes of union. Despite their infinite variety of purpose, the groupings of men reduce to a few principles of association. Among such "forms" are equality, superiority and subordination, division of

¹ "Sociologie et politique," sec. 20.

² "Les classes sociales."

³ "The Problem of Sociology," *Annals of the American Academy of Pol. and Soc. Science*, Nov., 1895.

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labor, imitation and opposition, secrecy, and hierarchy. To work out the various relations in which associates may stand to one another, and to discover what happens to groups in consequence of the more or less of each relation, is the task of the sociologist.

Nevertheless, it is better to consider this attractive area, not the domain of sociology, but only one of its provinces, viz., that of *social morphology*. The partialness of a conception which focuses our gaze on the human interactions themselves is well brought out by comparing it with another conception which rivets attention on the results or products of these interactions. For Dr. Ward the subject-matter of sociology consists in *human achievement*. How do languages, sciences, and arts come into being? How does the coral reef of civilization rise? This is certainly one of the most fascinating and practical of studies, but, as Ward distinctly states, it does not cover all the ground. His superb *Pure Sociology* should be, perhaps, the second or third volume in a complete treatise on sociology. For how can you draw a firm line between those modes of human interaction which yield a permanent product, and those which leave behind them no lasting result? Mobs and panics, public opinion and social suggestion, are certainly worthy of study, albeit they contribute nothing to the sum of human achievement.

A widening circle of thinkers make sociology equivalent to *the science of association*. They would have it deal with the conditions, motives, modes, phases, and products of association, whether