
SOCIETY

A TEXTBOOK OF SOCIOLOGY

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PREFACE

The present volume is a rewriting, with substantive additions, of the author's earlier work, *Society: Its Structure and Changes*. It has been undertaken at the request of a number of teachers who desired to follow the lines of the former work but needed a volume that had more definitely a textbook character and particularly one that would be more serviceable to those students who are for the first time approaching the subject through its pages. To this end much illustrative material has been added, while the scheme of interpretation has been clarified and made more explicit. The order of exposition has been changed so that the logical framework may be more clearly revealed, and subheads have been introduced throughout.

In this as in the earlier work I have endeavored to lead the student towards the understanding of the peculiar and elusive system of reality we name *society*. It is in the progressive understanding of systems that all genuine knowledge abides—and all genuine education. A text, even an introductory text, should present, not an agglomeration of disconnected materials but the orderly exposition of that scheme of things which constitutes its proper subject matter.

What the proper subject matter of sociology is, what it includes and excludes, is still very imperfectly realized. In my judgment the chief difficulty is the frequent tendency to identify the social with what anthropologists call the "cultural," that is, with the whole area and range of human activity. Many general texts of sociology treat economic and religious and technological and other topics as parts of their subject, for their own sake, as it were, and not for the light they throw on the questions of social relationship. There is, of course, no form of human activity which does not have a social aspect. But there is also none which does not have, say, a psychological aspect or an economic aspect. Our problem is first to

disentangle the social factor, and then to interpret it by showing its dependence on or relation to the other factors of human life. Only thus can we avoid the embarrassing inclusion of multifarious subjects without unity and without focus. Only thus can we develop a distinctive subject matter of sociology.

Sociology, concerned with the relationships of social beings as they cohere into systems and as they change in response to all the conditions that affect human life, calls for an art of revelation as well as a science of analysis. The facts and the figures, the complex changing patterns of social behavior, have a meaning beyond themselves. To present them aright we must first seek to *understand* them. Consequently I would here reiterate these words from the Preface of the earlier volume: "Sociology is not an easy study. It is full of embarrassing but fascinating difficulties. I hope this work will serve as a text for students, but I have not attempted to write down for them. Genuine students resent this too familiar process. In any event a textbook should not be a substitute for a teacher but rather should provide him with an opportunity for his art."

If in the present volume I have been able to approach perhaps a little nearer to this ideal I owe it largely to those teachers who have given me the benefit of their advice. To them—and among them I desire particularly to mention Professor Willard Waller—I hereby express my most sincere thanks.

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April, 1937

A WORD ABOUT SOCIOLOGY ITSELF

Abundant controversy has arisen over the question whether there is at all a subject deserving to be named sociology, whether if there is, it is a science, whether in that event it is a generic or a specific science, and so forth. We do not feel it necessary here to deal with such questions. In a sense the whole of this book offers an answer to them. It may suffice to state at the outset that for us the subject matter of sociology is social relationships as such. This is not the essential, certainly not the exclusive concern of the other sciences included under the rubric of "social." Anthropology studies man (especially primitive man) in terms of the whole scheme of his activities and his products; it is as much interested in his arts and techniques, his myths and his superstitions, as in his social institutions. Economics studies man as a wealth-getter and wealth-disposer and inquires into the relation of wealth (measured by money) and welfare. History studies the record of man, following the time-order of significant events. Psychology studies man as a behaving individual, or, as some prefer to put it, the interrelation between the organism and the world to which it responds. Social psychology is then a branch of psychology concerned with the ways in which the individual reacts to his social conditions. Sociology alone studies social relationships themselves, society itself. Thus the *focus* of none of these other sciences is identical with that of sociology, and it is always the focus of interest which distinguishes one social science from another. We should not think of the social sciences as dividing between them physically separate areas of reality. What distinguishes each from each is the selective interest.

Our interest then is in social relationships, as social, not merely as economic or political or religious. These are aspects, not compartments, of society. If two people meet in the market place, they are not just two "economic men," but two human beings, and they enter into relationships which are not simply economic. Our life

as social beings is not "made up" of our economic life and our political life and our family life and our aesthetic life and our religious life and our club life. We select these aspects for study according to our interest, and this is very necessary alike for the progress of our knowledge and for practical applications. But in thus selecting we are also abstracting from the actual social relationships into which social beings enter and neglecting for the time being the greater coherence of society which consists in the marvelously intricate and ever-changing pattern of the totality of these relationships. We are breaking up in thought, for the convenience of study or for the sake of practical control, that which is indissoluble in reality, and we cannot or should not be satisfied until our thought has restored the unity which it has taken away.

To find the focus of our subject is therefore of first importance. In particular, we should recognize that in studying society we are not attempting to study everything that happens "in society" or under social conditions, for that includes all human activity and all human learning. We shall be concerned with culture, but only for the light it throws on social relationships. We shall not, for example, study religion as religion or art as art or invention as invention. Unless we find and keep some focus we lose our way in the welter of phenomena, and this danger is always besetting the student of sociology. The only way to avoid this danger is to keep our interest focused upon social relationships themselves.

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BOOK ONE
INITIATION

PART ONE
THE NATURE OF SOCIETY

FOREWORD

There are certain primary concepts that the student of society must grasp and learn to use as his first step on the road to science. He must learn, that is, to attach a clear and definite meaning to the terms that signify his field of study and to the major distinctions within that field. The looseness of popular usage must be converted into the precision of scientific reference. So in Chapter I we define these terms and thus endeavor to clarify our essential concepts. Thence we proceed in Chapter II to another set of distinctions of a psychological nature which are logically prior to social relationships and which will play a large part in our analysis of the social structure. Of these distinctions the most important for our purpose is that between *interests* and *attitudes*, and, among interests themselves, that between the *like* and the *common*.

Thus prepared, we make in Chapter III a preliminary attack on the fundamental question on which men have reflected in every age—long before there was a subject called sociology—the question of the individual and the social unity. What does it mean to be a member of a community or group? What is the nature of the bond that unites us with our fellow men? It would be possible to proceed with our study of society leaving this question aside. But society will mean more to us and our study of it will be more significant if we see the nature of the problem and try to answer it for ourselves.

I

PRIMARY CONCEPTS

SOCIETY

Why we begin with definitions.—In everyday conversation we employ such terms as “society,” “community,” “crowd,” “institution,” “custom,” “social organization,” and so on. Throughout this book we shall be employing the same terms. But whereas in everyday conversation we do not (and usually need not) explain in advance what we mean by them, in a textbook of sociology it is highly important that we do so. The reason is as follows. When in the course of conversation a speaker makes mention of, say, “the community,” we generally know the particular reference from the context. He may be talking of “the local community” or “the Italian community in Greenwich Village” or “the community of churchgoers” or “the community chest” or “the community of property.” Though in each of these expressions the term “community” has a different meaning, we have usually no trouble in deciding between the various possible meanings. Again, when someone speaks of “the crowd,” he may be referring to “the rush-hour crowd” or “the sporting crowd” or “the crowd at So-and-so’s party”; and though an entirely different kind of social phenomenon is signified in each of these instances, we do not need to ask the speaker which meaning he intends.

But when we approach the study of society we can no longer be content to use the same term in varying senses. As sociologists, we are interested in social phenomena in the way in which botanists are interested in plants. We are interested in *the* community as a mode of social life, distinct from other forms of social organiza-

tion. We are interested in its common characteristics and in its various types. We are interested again not merely in this crowd or in that crowd, not merely in the description of a particular crowd at a particular time; we want to understand *the* crowd as a social phenomenon, to contrast, for example, the way men behave in crowds from the way they behave in other social relations.

So we must attach a clear and single and precise meaning to our terms, in spite of the fact that, being terms of ordinary speech, they have many variant usages. From this point we must start. The fullness of meaning, the richness of content of our concepts, will and must vary with the training and experience of each of us, but if we are to study anything together we must, when we use a word or phrase, be denoting, mentally pointing out, as it were, the same object. This necessity is most imperative for the primary terms, the key words of our study. To understand them fully would be to know all that is to be known, more than anyone does know, about their objects. The meaning grows and grows as we advance in knowledge, but the beginning of knowledge is that fixed reference or denotation which enables us to distinguish one object of thought from another.

Besides the fact that our terms are those of everyday speech, unlike the majority of terms in the natural sciences, there is a further reason why in the study of society we must exercise particular care over our definitions. The phenomena we are dealing with are not external tangible things, or kinds of thing, that can be identified directly by the senses. We cannot see or touch social relations or social organizations. Institutions cannot be handled and customs cannot be weighed in a balance. We cannot apply to them a microscope or a spectroscope or other scientific instrument to aid our senses. We cannot isolate our units in a laboratory. Our laboratory is itself the world of everyday living. It is this we must explore. It is there we must make our researches.

Our first task then is to define our primary terms in a brief preliminary account of the objects which these terms will signify throughout this work. In doing so we must remember that in the developing science of modern sociology there is no accepted authority, whether created by scientific tradition or otherwise, to impose a common terminology. Other writers will be found to use some of these terms in a different way. But if we form the habit of meaning always the same object when we use any of these terms, the present variety of usage will not seriously trouble us.

What we mean by society.—Our first, the most general of our

terms, is *society* itself. Social beings express their nature by creating and recreating an organization which guides and controls their behavior in myriad ways, which liberates and limits their activities, which sets up standards for them to follow and maintain, which in fact, in spite of all the imperfections and tyrannies it has exhibited in human history, is a necessary condition of every fulfillment of life. It is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and of mutual aid, of groupings and divisions, of controls and liberties. That whole organization we call society.

Society is the web of social relationships, but what do we mean by social relationship? We may approach the answer by contrasting the social with the physical. There is a relationship between a typewriter and a desk, between the earth and the sun, between fire and smoke, between two chemical constituents. Each is affected by the existence of the other, but the relationship is not a social one. The psychical condition is lacking. The typewriter and the desk are in no intelligible sense aware of the presence of one another. Their relationship is not in any way determined by mutual awareness. Without this recognition there is no society. It exists only where social beings conduct themselves, or "behave" towards one another in ways determined by their recognition of one another.

Here then is the ground of our definition. Any relationships so determined we may broadly name "social." It is true that among such relationships there are some which express mere conflict or unmitigated hostility, such as the relationships between two armies in time of war. Armies in the field are certainly aware of nothing so much, and their activities are animated by nothing so much, as the presence of one another. But if we call such relationships "social" we should certainly observe that the great majority of social relationships depend in some degree on a principle which these particular relationships expressly deny, the sense of community or of belonging together. As sociologists we may well study alike the conditions that unite and those that separate human beings. But if there were no sense of community there would be no social systems—there would be practically nothing for sociologists to study. Hence the relationships which are central to sociology are those which involve, in addition to mutual recognition, the sense of something held or shared in common.

It is clear that by this definition society is not limited to human beings. There are animal societies of all degrees. Even—or especially—among the insects, such as the ant, the bee, the hornet, there are remarkable social organizations. It might perhaps be contended