

THE PRINCIPLES OF COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY

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LONDON :
WATTS & CO.,
JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.4
1924

PREFACE

THE views respecting the nature and progress of modern society are very wide and elastic. No one knows what is the real import of our civilization, and from the actual state of affairs no one can learn much concerning true or essential culture and its illusory semblances.

By tracing the boundary-line between ethnical groups, man has perpetuated in some measure an inadequate system of conditions and conceptions. Erroneous opinions and old prejudices are accepted as the guiding principles of society. Evidently, the conflicts arising from such confusion must be permanent. As long as their causes remain unknown, social science grapples in the sphere of politics with appearances rather than with facts. The result of all efforts in international relations is to bring out the utter incapacity of our society to adjust itself to a more human system.

However complicated and advanced may appear the social organization of modern times, the structure

of society remains artificial. If we look at the matter broadly, we see that modern society is an impediment to all true progress. There is no way out of this state if society fails to bring its conditions and conceptions in harmony with man's nature. The present work has been written with a view of contributing towards the elucidation of the problem of national differentiations—that is, the problem which makes society so unstable. Our chief purpose has been to show that the socialization of nations should form the basis of an understanding between the various groups of men. The method that points to this conclusion is necessarily comparative and sociological. A new discipline arises from this fact. The truth is that a comparative science of society has grown, like any other science, out of a practical lore. Man's thoughts and actions in society demand a comparative view. His judgment on social matters is also comparative.

The principles of Comparative Sociology have always been found in social reality, though they have never been stated. The immediate object of such a science is to make them conscious, and to point out the applications which it illustrates.

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Political thinkers and sociologists will perhaps distrust a comparative science of society based on an independent sphere of research—a science that claims to explain what is the nature of the everlasting conflicts at the back of social groups. But they will not fail to pursue the truth when they examine the facts. For the necessity of investigating social phenomena from the viewpoint of the process of differentiations is felt to-day by any one who reflects a little upon the march of society.

N. P.

September, 1924.

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INTRODUCTION

§ 1. *Social Reality and Comparative Sociology*

THE question whether a comparative science of society is possible and necessary should be answered before the principles of such a science are exposed. Fundamentally it is a question which presses for immediate answer, since it arises from the nature of social reality itself. Social phenomena show a continuous change both in time and space. Their changing character in the course of years, as well as their varying conditions within the limits of a geographical area, cannot be denied. Indeed, society impresses one as a complex of differentiations, determined by infinite motives which seem to be wide apart and irreconcilable in their manifestation. Neither social organization nor social coherence can produce uniformity. On the contrary, the more organized a group of men the more diversified it appears, and the more coherent its social structure the more divergent it appears to us. The truth is that whenever men come to live together they develop a variety of conditions and conceptions. The social process seems to reside in an infinite process of differentiation.

In face of such heterogeneity one is tempted instinctively to establish some relations of identity or some points of resemblance and analogy. As a matter of fact, one feels the need of obtaining an insight into the

wayward aspect of social reality. The first step to this always leads to comparison. Thus the process of comparison imposes itself upon us through the nature of society. We compare the differences, we find resemblances, and we establish relations in order to find a clue that would guide us through the labyrinth of social differentiations.

The process of comparison is, however, not something specific to social phenomena. It may be found in any field of knowledge, for reality shows everywhere an infinity of forms. The act of judgment itself implies comparison. The proposition that unites two terms reflects comparison. From this point of view, to compare means to think. Moreover, the comparative method is used by every descriptive science. New disciplines based on the comparative study of phenomena have arisen during the last century, and General Sociology especially uses the same method.¹

We see, then, that the application of the comparative method to social phenomena does not represent a specific fact that would justify a comparative science of society. There are sociologists who regard such a discipline not even as a branch of the general body of Sociology, but merely as Sociology itself. Thus *Durkheim* takes the comparative study of social phenomena, which is

¹ The sociological studies of Westermarck, Lévy-Bruhl, etc., are based on comparative material—that is, on facts and observations obtained from different places and in different times. Although such comparative studies do not constitute an independent science, yet they show their rôle in the elucidation of social phenomena. In a more special sense A. Van Gennep has applied the comparative method to the problem of nationality. See his work, *Traité comparatif des Nationalités* (Paris, 1922).

inseparable from every sociological inquiry, for the proper method of any social science.¹

Evidently the comparative method does not give birth to a new social science. Although Sociology is always comparative in method, yet a comparative science of society cannot have independent existence on this account only. There must be some special ground to justify not only the name, but equally the object of such a science. For this purpose it will be an indispensable condition to point out the data upon which Comparative Sociology rests. For, before determining its proper sphere, we must show from what set of facts it arises. In this sense we shall endeavour to indicate the fundamental problems which make a comparative science of society both possible and necessary.

§ 2. *The Unity of Human Nature*

When analogies are discovered which show similarity of conditions and conceptions in the production of a social phenomenon, the tendency of generalizing such relations always leads to the conclusion that there must be some common ground that determines human thought and action in society. The historian inquiring into the past observes that there are permanent motives at any time and in every nation—motives which determine social life in its general aspect. This is, in fact, the impression that one receives in reading descriptions of customs and social institutions made by various ancient authors. The historians, philosophers, and poets of

¹ *Les Règles de la Méthode Sociologique* (Paris, 1919), p. 169.

ancient times would be inaccessible to us if they did not express themselves in terms which come out directly from a common psychic substratum. What attracts us in these productions of the past is more their general human character than their different archaic form.

In reading an aphorism from the Sanscrit literature, laid down several thousand years ago and within an idealistic civilization, we are astonished to find a seed of modern truth that sounds as human as ever: "In poverty a friend forsakes you; son, and wife, and brothers too forsake you; being rich, they cling to you; wealth in this world is a great friend."¹ *Confucius*, who lived five hundred years before Christ, has a proposition identical with that of the Gospels: "Do not unto others what you would not have them do to you."² *Herodot*, in describing the manners and customs of the Egyptians, observes that they are exactly reverse to the common practice of mankind. He mentions in this respect several curiosities, such as the fact that the women go to market while the men stay at home and web; that while the rest of the world works the woof up the wrap the Egyptians work it down; that the inhabitants of cities eat in the street, etc.³ In pointing out the fact that the Egyptians write from right to left the Greek historian adds ironically that the Egyptians insist that it is they who write to the right, and the Greeks who write to the left.⁴ This observation is characteristic for the science that interests us here. What Herodot considers

¹ *The Niti Literature of Burma*, ed. by James Gray (London, 1886), p. 19.

² W. A. P. Martin, *The Awakening of China* (New York, 1910), p. 92.

³ *Hist.*, II, 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

as absurd from his point of view, appears no less absurd from the viewpoint of the Egyptians.

Fustel de Coulanges affirms that nothing of the ancient Greek and Roman civilization resembles our modern civilization.¹ His work proves, however, our own thesis. The description he gives of the customs, beliefs, practices, and social institutions of Athens and Rome shows indirectly that these phenomena were sustained by the same sentiments and instincts prevailing throughout the human race. Moreover, the same author points directly to the existence of a common substratum when he asserts, for instance, that the cult of the dead was identical in India as well as in Greece and Italy, and that the *Book of Manu* contains the data of such a cult.² For the difference of physical conditions between these peoples, as well as the difference of moral conceptions of the Hindoo, Greek, and Roman civilizations, would exclude the identity of such an important institution if there were no common ground between the various peoples of the earth. It may be observed that the three peoples belonged to the same Aryan stock. We cannot, however, consider the theory of an Aryan race, for it is of no consequence for our present purpose. If there has ever been such a race, its existence does not sufficiently explain the common ground of the three civilizations, since these possess elements which are found in the civilization of other races. Thus the

¹ *La Cité Antique*, Introd.

² *Op. cit.*, I, chap. ii. The same applies to domestic religion, where the sentiment of adoration for parents appears "*comme principe d'une religion à l'origine de presque toutes les sociétés humaines*" (chap. iv).

Village Community is no more regarded as an institution characteristic of the Aryan race, since it has been found among the populations of Java and among some obscure Semitic tribes in Northern Africa.¹

The study of Sanscrit and Chinese literatures during the past century has strengthened the conviction that the civilizations of India and China contain some common ground with the civilizations of later epochs. The new discoveries of Egyptology, the decipherment of the Assyrian inscriptions, have pointed to the same fact. Thus the motives of many legends and tales known to Western peoples have been found in the products of the most ancient civilizations.² Lastly, Anthropology and Ethnology have equally pointed to the evidence of the unity of human nature that lies in the various customs, beliefs, and institutions of all the peoples of the earth.³

¹ H. S. Maine, *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions*, (New York, 1875), p. 77.

² The Biblical story of the Deluge is found in the Babylonian epic of "Gisdhubar." See G. Smith, *The Chaldean Account of Genesis* (New York, 1876), p. 27. Cf. A. H. Sayce, *Assyria: Its Princes, Priests, and Peoples* (New York, 1895), p. 81. The Deluge story seems to be a universal tradition, for it is found even among primitive tribes. Cf. E. B. Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, 3rd ed. (London, 1878), p. 325. Furthermore, the Joseph-Potiphar incident in the Bible has been found in the Egyptian *Tale of the Two Brothers*. See G. Maspero, *Les Contes Populaires de l'Egypte ancienne*, 3rd ed. (Paris, 1906), Introd. Cf. F. L. Griffith, "Notes on the d'Orbiney Papyrus," in *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, t. vii, 1888-9. The Tortoise myths of India regarding the earth are found among the North American Indians. See Tylor, *op. cit.*, p. 343. There is no end to such coincidences. Ethnology and folklore are discovering new facts in this respect. Cf. M. Beza, "Percy's Reliques, Sir Walter Scott's Minstrelsy, and the Roumanian Ballads," in *The Slavonic Review*, vol. i (June, 1922), pp. 121-9.

³ Lazarus and Steinthal, in starting from the premise that the

The most convincing proofs of the unity of human nature are found in popular and anonymous productions. It is true that every social group has its characteristic forms, but these always reflect a common ground that belongs to human nature in general. Thus proverbs, legends, tales, superstitions, are the expression of the same sentiments. Comparative Mythology reveals to us an infinity of examples in this respect. The study of Folklore on a comparative basis gives us the same insight into the various forms of conceptions preserved unreflectively among peoples of different races and ages. The problem of the diffusion of folk-tales, though unsolved, indicates the existence of a common substratum throughout the human race. Nearly all of *Esop's* fables are found in the Sanscrit literature.¹ Some of *Homer's* tales are found among Tahitians and the Negroes of West-Indies.² Many of the religious beliefs of the various peoples of antiquity are identical, while the legends and

form of social life of mankind consists in the differentiation of peoples, and in applying by analogy individual psychology to the forms of social groups, have conceived a "Folkpsychology" (*Völkerpsychologie*), the function of which is to know the nature of the folk-spirit (*Volksgeist*) in all its manifestations. See *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, vol. i (1860), pp. 5-7. This conception, influenced partly by the Hegelian doctrine of State and partly by Herbartian psychology, does not contain the basis of a comparative science of society, since it reduces the human spirit to the forms of a certain political and social group. A Folkpsychology thus conceived could furnish only the material for the general science of spirit. Its insufficiency resides in the fact that it considers the Nation or the State as an entity.

¹ Cf. W. R. Halliday. "Notes upon the Indo-European Folk-Tales and the Problem of their Diffusion," in *Folklore* (June, 1923), pp. 117-140.

² E. B. Tylor, *Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (London, 1889), p. 393.

prejudices which live in the tradition of every ethnical group are different in form only.

The attempt to find a common basis for all existent religions has arisen from the same impression of identity. *Hume* has shown that there is a natural religion, the origin of which should not be searched in thought, but merely in the sentiments and instincts of human nature.¹ In fact, there is a Philosophy of Religion just because there is a common ground in religion. One finds in this respect fundamental conceptions, such as the pantheistic belief in a world soul, to be prevalent among both civilized and savage peoples.²

Furthermore, the Philosophy of History and the History of Culture have arisen from the same need of synthesis, which presupposes the existence of an identity at the basis of all human manifestations in society. Both disciplines consider social reality as a complex of conditions, in which national differentiations are nothing but modes of manifestation of a common ground.

The unity of human nature reveals itself to us clearer when we inquire into the laws (customary and written) of different peoples. Even the savage tribes have their rules of right and wrong.³ In spite of their different

¹ *The Natural History of Religion*, Introd.; cf. Fr. Schleiermacher, *Reden über die Religion*, V.

² A. Bastian, *Der Menschheitsgedanke durch Raum und Zeit* (Berlin, 1901), vol. i, pp. 58-9, and *Ethnologische Forschungen*, (Jena, 1871-3), vol. ii, p. 326. Cf. V. Cathrein, *Die Einheit des sittlichen Bewusstseins der Menschheit* (Friburg, i. B., 1914), vol. i, p. 627.

³ "On questioning intelligent men among the Bakwains as to their former knowledge of good and evil, of God and the future

forms, the laws of every group of men possess a common ground. The science of Comparative Law is based upon such a ground. There is a natural law because there are general principles inherent in every manifestation of human nature. *Aristotle* distinguished the notion of "general law" (*νόμος κοινός*) from the particular laws of a certain community.¹ What the Scholastics called in the religious sense "*lex eterna*," is also the reflection of a general principle at the basis of all possible law. Moreover, International Law rests upon the same ground. Without the assumption that there is a general notion of right for all nations (*ius gentium*) there could be no International Law. The modern form of Natural Law has been called Cultural Law—that is, the Law which corresponds to the need of mankind for a universal form of culture, or to a common ground for all peoples.²

Comparative Philology and Universal History have started from the same impression of unity. The comparative study of languages and literature discloses, in fact, a common substratum, from which national peculiarities appear as forms of manifestation of the same ground. This also applies to the study of historical facts from the universal point of view, which means the conception of history in relation to the general character

state, they have scouted the idea of any of them ever having been without a tolerably clear conception on all these subjects. Respecting their sense of right and wrong, they profess that nothing we indicate as sin ever appeared to them otherwise, except the statement that it was wrong to have more wives than one." D. Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London, 1857), p. 158.

¹ *Rhetor.*, I.

² Cf. J. Kohler, *Grundlagen des Völkerrechts* (Stuttgart, 1918), p. 2, and J. C. Bluntschli, *Das moderne Völkerrecht der civilisirten Staaten*, 2nd ed. (Nördlingen, 1872), p. 63.

of human nature and independently of geographic or national limitations.

Finally, every discipline of the so-called sciences of spirit takes into account the identical ground of man's manifestations in society. Without the existence of such an identity it would be impossible to obtain unity in these sciences, or to establish relations between their data.¹

§ 3. *The National Spirit in Society*

In spite of the foregoing considerations, it seems to me that to take the unity of human nature as criterion and term of comparison is to complicate the question which interests us here. In fact, it may be objected that we look upon social reality through a concept which itself presupposes this reality. We should find a term of comparison less abstract, and which could be easily used in the comparative study of social phenomena. One may suggest that "society" is a more adequate term, since the mind manifests itself within its sphere, and since all sciences have arisen from the conditions and conceptions which are produced by the social organization of man. This is the criterion of the sociologists who attempt to eliminate the spontaneity of spirit in society. Social

¹ The question which the so-called "historical school" of Ethnology has been considering recently, that the widespread similarities of culture are due merely to the fact of communication in the past (W. H. R. Rivers, *History and Ethnology*, London, 1922, pp. 4-5), does not contradict the fact of the unity of the human race. For the adoption of foreign customs by a group is possible only on the ground that there exists a certain affinity of feeling and thinking. Cf. E. B. Tylor, *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilization*, p. 5, and A. H. Keane, *The World's Peoples* (New York, 1908), p. 2.