

SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

*A HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS OF
SOCIOLOGY*

COMPILED BY

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PREFACE

The problem of human welfare, before which all others seem trivial in comparison, is not to be understood without the widest attainable knowledge of things pertaining to man. Up to the present time the economist is undoubtedly the one who has made the most searching and the most effective study of this problem. But other light is needed and a wider view is necessary than the economist is in the habit of taking. The present volume is compiled for the purpose of presenting to the student, in convenient form, material for this wider view. It is based upon twelve years of college and university teaching. The selections presented are those which the compiler has found by experience to be the most instructive, the most stimulating, and the most thought-provoking. No attempt has been made to select only such passages as embody the compiler's views, or even to select such as are invariably sound and accurate. The fact that a passage has proved brilliantly suggestive and provocative of serious inquiry has, in several cases, been the chief reason for including it.

It is the hope of the compiler that this volume may prove useful both to the college student and to the general reader. In college classes it is designed to be used as supplementary to an elementary text-book, as collateral reading to a course of lectures, or as a basis for class-room discussions. The latter is by far the most effective method yet devised for the teaching of the social sciences, and in connection with this method the compiler ventures to hope that this volume may prove especially useful.

The compiler wishes to express here his gratitude for the many courtesies which he has received from authors and publishers. He is under especial obligation to Messrs. D. Appleton & Co.,

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SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

I

INTRODUCTION

It is only partially true that sociology is a new science. It is true that the name has only recently been applied to a definite body of knowledge, and it is still more recently that there has been a group of scholars devoting themselves exclusively to this subject and going by the name of sociologists. But it is not true that human society, the subject of sociological study, has only recently attracted the attention of students. On the contrary, it is one of the oldest subjects of inquiry and speculation. The philosopher, the theologian, the moralist, the man of science, and the economist have all devoted time to this subject, and each has made his contribution to it. Indeed, it is the opinion of many students in this field that some of the most significant contributions to our knowledge of society have been made not by writers who profess to be sociologists but by men who have turned their attention to those phases of social life which lie nearest their special fields of inquiry. Such writers have not occupied themselves with problems of nomenclature and classification, but have saved their energies for matters of more vital concern, whereas many of our formal treatises on sociology have been largely concerned with matters more formal than vital.

This is not to belittle the importance of the formalities of science. Classification, nomenclature, and description have their value; nevertheless, the student of society is only incidentally interested in such matters. His knowledge is not materially

increased by attempts to explain what society is like. He has a fairly definite idea already, though he may not be able to state his idea in specific terms. But, as Professor Marshall reminds us, our most familiar concepts are frequently the most difficult to define. It is very difficult to define a house, yet most of us have a fairly clear idea as to what a house is. One might add that, even if a house could be defined, the definition would add little or nothing to our knowledge. The same may be said of a definition of society. Since our science deals with a subject which is so familiar, at least in its superficial aspects, to every student of mature mind, its formalities are rather less important than those of some of the other sciences where the subject-matter lies outside the experience and observation of everyday life.

After all, the student of sociology is most vitally interested in gaining a knowledge of the social processes and the relations of cause and effect among social phenomena. This knowledge is absolutely essential to any intelligent effort at social improvement, and social improvement is the only worthy aim of the student. Even the early history of society and the origin of social institutions, interesting as these subjects are to the scientifically curious, derive their chief value from the light which they may throw on the problem of social improvement. But more valuable even than historical study is the analytical study of the social processes and the social forces which are at work in the society of the present, and which may be assumed to be shaping the society of the future. Any attempt to improve the society of the future must manifestly work in harmony with these forces.

It is probably safe to say that the economist is the only one of the various students of society who has accomplished much in the way of perfecting this analysis. On the purely economic side of social life, considerable progress has been made in this direction, and it therefore seems probable that the method of sociology will be an expansion of the method of economics. The success with which the science of economics has been developed has been partly due to the fact that economists have strictly limited the scope of their inquiry. This was a necessary feature

of their method, at least in the early stages of the science ; but the interest of the public in some of the broader aspects of social science is increasing day by day, and it is proper therefore to raise the question whether the time is not ripe for an expansion of the method of economics into the general field of social science.

It is a favorable sign that economists are already showing a tendency to take the broad view, or to consider the bearings of economic facts and principles upon the broader questions of human progress and social development. In so far as sociology has as yet justified its existence, it is because sociologists have emphasized these broader questions more than economists have seen fit to do. However, the chief danger is that if sociology is to be developed from the economic standpoint, and by an expansion of the method of economics, the purely economic factors will be overemphasized. This seems to have been the result of most attempts at what is called the "economic interpretation of history."

One who is acquainted with the ordinary meaning of words, but unacquainted with the way this particular expression has actually been used, would probably infer that the "economic interpretation of history" meant the interpretation of historical development in the light of economic knowledge, just as the historical interpretation of economics means the interpretation of economic conditions in the light of historical knowledge. But a brief examination of those works which have attempted the economic interpretation of history reveals the fact that this expression means that economic factors have largely determined the course of history. This is the dogma, for example, to which Professor Seligman¹ applies the following thesis.

The existence of man depends upon his ability to sustain himself ; the economic life is therefore the fundamental condition of all life. Since human life, however, is the life of man in society, individual existence moves within the framework of the social structure and is modified

¹ Edwin R. A. Seligman, *The Economic Interpretation of History*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1902.

by it. What the conditions are to the individual, the similar relations of production and consumption are to the community. To economic causes, therefore, must be traced, in the last instance, those transformations in the structure of society which themselves condition the relations of social classes and the various manifestations of social life.

In so far as this statement of the thesis foreshadows the subsequent argument it occurs to one as being singularly inconclusive. One might as well say the existence of man depends upon his ability to reproduce himself, and family life is therefore, etc.; or the existence of man depends upon his ability to defend himself, and military life is therefore, etc. Thus one might go on indefinitely adding to the number of causes which "in the last instance" determine the forms of social development. If it be retorted that the methods of gaining subsistence largely determine the forms of family and military life, the reply is that the forms of military and family life and the necessities of military defense also largely determine the forms of industry. The sexual impulse is quite as elementary as the desire for food, and it is to this elementary impulse that we owe the existence of the family, though its form is more or less modified by the conditions of subsistence, as well as by the spiritual, the moral, and the military conditions of the community. As to which precedes in point of time, it would be difficult to say, and the answer would be of no value even if it could be found out. The necessities of military defense, as Spencer has well brought out in his antithesis between the industrial and the militant types of society, are quite as potent in the determination of social forms and usages, and religious and moral ideas and conceptions, as the necessities of subsistence can possibly be. Here again the question as to which precedes in point of time — the necessity for subsistence or the necessity for defense — is a matter of no consequence.

Whatever merit there may be in the dogma that the economic factors have the leading part in shaping social development and in determining the course of history, and whatever the emphasis that may properly be laid upon this dogma, there is another aspect of the "economic interpretation of history" which deserves especial consideration, and which has been largely neglected in

discussions of this topic. As has already been suggested, the "economic interpretation of history" would seem, at first sight, to mean the interpretation of historical facts in the light of one's economic knowledge. If for the term "economic knowledge" could be substituted "knowledge of human society," this statement of the doctrine would clear up much of the obscurity which exists regarding the relation of the study of economic and social conditions to the study of history. Hitherto the field has been left practically in the hands of the historian or the historical economist, who has claimed that a knowledge of history was essential to the understanding of the present economic conditions. It is true in a much stricter sense that a knowledge of the present economic and social conditions is essential to even the most elementary knowledge of history. What has been overlooked in the modern evolutionary theory of history is the fundamental principle which formed the basis of the whole evolutionary theory of modern science, namely, the principle that all past development, whether in the field of geology or biology, must be accounted for on the ground of forces and factors now at work, and which can be observed at first hand by the student. Thus a preliminary study of dynamical geology, since Sir Charles Lyell, must precede any attempt at tracing geological history. If we accept the anticataclysmic theory of history as the basis of a theory of historical development, we must likewise conclude that a study of the social factors and forces as they exist in the world about us must precede any attempt at the explanation of historical development. One might as well undertake the study of paleontology without some preliminary knowledge of biology as to undertake the study of history without some preliminary knowledge of economics or sociology. It is in this study of first-hand materials, in the observation of social activities about us, that we must get our clue to the relation of cause and effect in social and political affairs; and until we have this clue, historical facts are merely so many isolated and unconnected events. The only thing that has saved history in the past from being a mere collection of accidental, unrelated events is the fact that historians, even without special training, have had some ideas regarding causation in social and political

affairs. But this general knowledge which we call common sense, and which belongs within certain limits to every intelligent person, cannot take the place of trained observation and scientific methods of investigation. A student of paleontology might, from the few general and elementary facts which he had gathered by unscientific observation, do something in this field, but he could by no means expect to compete with the student who had made a study of biology according to scientific methods, and who had some training in scientific observation and reasoning. This is the theory of the economic or social interpretation of history to which we must finally come if we would deserve to be put in the same class with scientists working in other fields. The study of sociology must therefore be the study of the social factors and forces as they are found in the world about us; and this study will bear the same relation to history that the study of dynamical geology bears to historical geology, or as the study of biology bears to paleontology. To be sure, historical geology and paleontology again throw new light upon dynamical geology and upon biology, but it is perfectly clear where the study must begin. The same principle will apply to sociology and history, and to theoretical and historical economics.

That line of study which is ordinarily called economic theory differs from economic history not in the methods of reasoning employed but in the source of information. The one goes directly to the facts of the social and economic life of the surrounding world, while the other goes to historical documents. The one observes phenomena at first hand, the other through the media of historical records of all kinds. The distinction between the theoretical and the descriptive economist is that the one tries to find the causal connection between economic facts which come under his observation, while the other merely tries to describe them. Until one has some elementary notions regarding economic causation he is not in a position even to begin the study of economic history. He would see no more connection between a rise of British consols and Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo than he would see between Napoleon's defeat and an eclipse of the moon. But an opinion regarding economic causation is an economic theory.

What economists and historians need, therefore, is not an opinion as to the relative importance of the various factors which have determined the course of history, but a clear perception of the importance of a first-hand study of the factors and forces in the contemporary social world. Following the suggestion of the anti-cataclysmic theory of geological and biological development, the present writer would like to lay down the following thesis as a challenge.

*Every great historical epoch and every variety of social organization must be explained on the basis of factors and forces now at work, and which the student may study at first hand.*¹

Our conclusion as to the relation of sociology to economics is, therefore, that sociology is merely an expansion of the method of economics to include a study of many factors in social development which are not ordinarily considered by the economist; while the relation of sociology to history is the same as that between dynamical geology and historical geology, or between biology and paleontology. Sociology is a study at first hand of those factors and forces which govern social phenomena and the relation of cause and effect among them, whereas history is an attempt to trace the actual course of social development in the past. Though the study of history is highly essential to a thorough understanding of the principles of sociology, a knowledge of the principles of sociology is vastly more essential to any thorough understanding of history.

It is the opinion of the present writer that whatever aid the study of sociology may furnish to the study of the history of the past, it can hardly justify its existence unless it furnishes us a theory of progress which will enable us to shape the policies of society with a view to future improvement. In other words, the fundamental task of the sociologist is to furnish a theory of social progress.

The first difficulty in the way of the student bent upon the performance of that task is that of defining progress itself. Generally speaking the idea of human progress carries with it

¹ Cf. the author's article on the "Economic Interpretation of History," *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 93-99.

the idea of human well-being. Social progress and social improvement, from the standpoint of human happiness, are ideas so closely connected in the popular mind that it is almost impossible to separate them. However, the late Herbert Spencer¹ combats this conception as being shifting and indefinite, and denies that the improvement in the well-being of the people is necessarily a mark of progress. "Social progress," says he, "is supposed to consist in the making of a greater quantity and variety of the articles required for satisfying men's wants, in the increasing security of person and property, in widening freedom and action; whereas, rightly understood, social progress consists in those changes of structure in the social organism which have entailed these consequences. The current conception is a teleological one. But rightly to understand progress we must understand the nature of these changes considered apart from our interests; cease, for example, to regard the geological modifications which take place in the earth as modifications which fit it for the habitation of man, and as therefore constituting geological progress. We must ascertain the character common to these modifications, whether in the physical, the biological, or the social world, — the law to which they all conform." His idea therefore is that there must be one universal law of progress which dominates the development of the physical universe out of primeval chaos, the development of the present highly diversified forms of animal and vegetable life out of the primordial cell or protoplasm, and the development of the present highly organized human societies out of the primitive horde of human beings. This universal principle of progress is simply the change from homogeneity to heterogeneity. "From the earliest traceable cosmical changes down to the latest results of civilization we shall find that the transformation of the homogeneous into the heterogeneous is that in which progress essentially consists" (page 10, *op. cit.*).

That a universal principle of development is desirable, in fact essential, as a basis for a theory of social progress must be admitted. But it seems that such a principle can be found

¹ Progress, Its Law and Cause, Vol. I, "Essays Scientific, Political, and Speculative," pp. 8-62.

without sacrificing the idea of well-being as a mark of progress. Back of this change from homogeneity to heterogeneity lies the principle of adaptation so familiar to all students of evolution. Now adaptation in human society is necessarily connected with well-being. A society which has undergone such modifications internally and externally as adapt it to its conditions is a society which enjoys a high degree of well-being; and the society which is ill-adapted to its conditions is a society which does not enjoy a high degree of well-being. While the term "well-being" can be applied only within the field of sentient life, "adaptation" is a term which may apply to all existence, sentient or nonsentient. But within the sphere of sentient existence adaptation and well-being are so inseparably connected that they may almost be said to mean the same thing. Therefore it is assumed in this work that well-being is a mark of progress, though progress is defined in terms of adaptation.

✓ This adaptation which takes place in human society is either passive or active. By passive adaptation is meant the modification of the species itself to suit the conditions under which it lives; and by active adaptation is meant the modification of the conditions to suit the species. Man has been defined as a being who adapts his surroundings to himself, whereas other animals are adapted to their surroundings. If, for example, the climate is cold, other animals must develop fur, or blubber, or feathers, or some other means of withstanding cold or protecting themselves from it; whereas man manufactures clothing, builds a fire, or constructs a house. If food is to be obtained from the sea, other animals must develop webfeet, or flippers, or some other means of propelling themselves through the water; whereas man builds a boat and makes fishing tackle. If food is to be transported long distances, other animals must, like the pelican, develop a pouch, or like the camel, develop a hump and a stomach lined with cisterns; whereas man learns to cure his food and to build transportation systems. If the opposite sex is to be won, other animals must develop brilliant plumage, or antlers, or a mane; whereas man substitutes the barber's and the haberdasher's arts, clothes himself in fine raiment, or furnishes economic support.