

ARTICLE IX.

CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL PHENOMENA.

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I.

IT is the first work of a new science to describe and classify the phenomena which it is to study, and the success with which this is done, is in some sense a criterion of the advance which a science has made. If sociology were to be judged to-day by such a criterion, it would indeed take low rank. Perhaps it presents no more vulnerable point to those who question its claims to be a science at all, than this very confusion as to the definition and classification of the objects it would study. Not infrequently sociologists have committed the logical error of using more than one principle of classification. When Comte asserts that the individual, the family, and "society" are the social organs, it is apparent that the list is by no means exhaustive, and secondly that the organs enumerated are in no sense homogeneous. Apart from such logical blunders, students of society have conspicuously failed to agree on any one classification, and this failure to agree on some common foundation has proved almost fatal to any real progress in the science.

The importance of a true system of classification is indicated by Mr. Mill's¹ statement of its purpose, to "give us the greatest command over our knowledge already acquired, and lead most directly to the acquisition of more." And Mr. Jevons² states the purpose to be "primarily to disclose the correlations or laws of union of properties and circumstances."

¹ Logic, Book iv. chap. vii.

² Principles of Science, p. 677.

Almost any method of classification serves this purpose to some extent, but science seeks the best method. The theory of evolution has wrought a great change in the logic of natural science by demonstrating that there is one really natural method of classification. According to this theory, organisms of different species have sprung from a common stock, and wherever the genetic relation can be discovered it determines the natural classification. This method is comparatively simple and easily applied in the case of biology, and even of botany; in geology and astronomy it is not impracticable; but in chemistry, for instance, it is quite useless. I believe that sociology belongs to the same group of sciences, in this respect, as biology. The evolution of social activities and social institutions bears some resemblance to the evolution of organisms; and if we can trace the complex phenomena back to a few simple sources we have the key to the genetic, natural classification that we seek. The classification thus reached will be final (for the present state of our knowledge), and it can but be suggestive to the student of social laws.

The "biological" school of sociologists have partially recognized the truth just stated, even when they have not followed out the principle in their work. The essential fact with which a genetic classification begins, the fact that social activities, groups, and institutions are to be classified according to the same principle, has been developed very clearly by Mr. Spencer. Social aggregates arise in the process of social activities, social organs properly so called arise as the organs performing definite social functions; and as soon as the modes of social activity are rightly classified, social groups, and the institutions for which these groups stand, are to be classified in the same way. I can go no farther with Mr. Spencer and his followers, for it seems to me that the grouping of social phenomena according to the three "systems" found in the higher animals¹ is simply the result of a forced analogy, the

¹ Principles of Sociology, Part ii. chap. vi.

importation of an extraneous system from a distinct science. Indeed Mr. Spencer himself does not use this principle when he groups social phenomena for actual discussion, nor can I find that he offers any justification for his division of institutions into six kinds.¹ And when his followers have attempted to combine the threefold biological division with the results of empirical observation,² the incompatibility of the two has been made very evident.

The natural, i. e. the genetic, system for classifying social phenomena aims first to secure a true classification of social activities, since this is the key to what it seeks. The factory and the railroad and the bank arise in the economic activity of society; the government, state or municipal, the political party, the parliament and the law court as groups of men, arise in connection with its political activity; and if the different activities of society can be defined and classified, there is no difficulty in dealing with social groups. And with the understanding of economic groups is given the key to the understanding of economic institutions; the state, parliamentary government, the judiciary, as institutions, are classified along with the political groups that represent them. Explaining them from the standpoint of their origin, we find that social groups and social institutions arise in connection with the different social activities, and are to be classified as the activities are classified.

II.

Having thus cleared the ground and stated the problem as I conceive it, I desire to offer a tentative solution of the problem. Even if the solution is correct in principle, the elaboration of details is no easy matter; and what is suggested must no doubt be modified at many points.

The various attempts to classify forms of social activity em-

¹ *Principles of Sociology*, Parts iii.-viii.

² E. g. Small & Vincent, *Introduction to the Study of Society*, pp. 240-241.

pirically have met with no marked success, nor have they commanded general assent. The only satisfactory result that has been gained by studying these activities themselves is the reduction of very many complex forms to the simpler forms from which they are derived. This result is not to be underestimated, but the question still remains as to the number and character of the fundamental social activities. The only real solution of this question lies in the study of the causes of these activities, the stimuli from which they spring; and here the problem is comparatively simple.

The careful student of society will hardly question the statement that the motive power in society is to be found in the needs and emotions of individuals. Society as a whole has no brain, and the individual in society is the center of activity as well as the center of consciousness. The individual's love of the beautiful is at the basis of all artistic activity; his need of food and clothing is the primary motive to which the complex forms of economic activity are due. The different ends which stimulate the individual to activity are the ultimate sources of all social activity. It is quite true that society gives definite form to these ends for the individual, society determines in what manner his physical and psychical wants shall be satisfied, and it very greatly enlarges the number of his needs: nevertheless it remains true that in the needs of the individual is found the power that keeps society in motion.

When the psychologist is studying the complex variety of sense-representations in the current of ideas, he often finds it convenient to classify the representations in view of their origin according to the sense to which each is due, or (what is practically the same thing) according to the stimuli of light or heat or sound to which each is due. The sociologist finds that man's need of food, his need of companionship, his need of protection, etc., are the factors that produce social activity, so he naturally concludes that activities are to be classified on

the same principle as the stimuli that produce them. The study of these needs as stimuli may be beset with many difficulties, still we may expect from it some light on the relation of social activities.

Even those writers who have recognized the dynamic character of society, have discussed man's needs and emotions as social *forces*;¹ and this phrase has effectually obscured the correlation of activities and the stimuli that produce activities. The metaphor from physical mechanics is correctly applied to a different fact in sociology, quite distinct from that which it is ordinarily used to denote. Social force is properly the energy of a social group, its power to overcome obstacles and to perform its proper function. This force is essentially the same and is to be determined in the same way for each of the different kinds of social groups. The "force" of a political group, an economic corporation, a school of thought, is its power to do its work and to maintain itself in contest with other groups. In a word the force or energy of a social group is wholly independent of the kind of group; and while the study of the force of social bodies is very important, it sheds little light on the structure of social groups or of the society which they constitute. All social activity, as we have seen, may be traced back to motives felt by the individual, and the character of the activity as well as its intensity is determined by the stimulus from which it springs. While social force is purely quantitative, the stimuli to social activity are first of all qualitative and are distinguished by their different qualities. While social force is to be predicated of the group as a whole, social stimuli act upon individuals and are called social only because they lead to social activity.

Having reduced the question to its simplest terms, we find that the material for its answer has already been collected by the sociologist under the name of social forces, and by the psychologist in his study of man's emotional nature. Man's

¹ Ward, *Dynamic Sociology*, Vol. i. pp. 468-706.

essential needs and the emotions which lead him to satisfy these needs are comparatively simple, nor is it difficult to define them distinctly and sharply. Many of the so-called needs of the man in highly civilized society are but the development of the simple needs that man shares in common with other animals, and as such are to be understood in the light of the simpler forms from which they have sprung. Other needs do not exist for animals, and are at best dormant among savage races. In general the stimuli to social activity may be classified as original and derived. The first class includes needs and emotions that are practically universal and do not depend on a developed state of society for their existence. The derived stimuli are such needs and emotions as imply a somewhat advanced state of society, and only arise in the course of social development. The first class will include (1) the need of food and clothing, which gives rise to the sensations of hunger and of cold; (2) the need of protection against one's fellow-creatures, which appears in the feeling of fear; and (3) the need of companionship and the emotions connected with the social relations of men. The activities due to these stimuli will vary exceedingly in the course of social development, but these needs of men remain the basis of life in society. The second class are called derived stimuli, for social life itself develops new desires, and these in turn lead to higher forms of social activity. Under this head are included intellectual needs, æsthetic desires, the need of moral approval, and finally the need of religious communion.

In order to understand how the complex life of society depends primarily on the same simple needs that lead to activity in the animal world, it is only necessary to remember the reaction of society on these needs. The lowest savage races may live in "hordes," human herds, and satisfy hunger as did the animals; but their only strength lay in some combination. The simplest structure meant new power to satisfy each form of need, and with the new power the need changed. Food is

necessary in more constant supply and in far greater variety; the simple form of clothing and of the hut that the tribe constructs becomes a necessity. At length some tribe develops an organization stable enough so that slavery is possible. The economic needs that had before been satisfied with difficulty by labor or plunder are now relieved by the toil of others; masters had leisure for other forms of activity and the complex fabric of truly human society began to arise. Slave and master alike were dependent on the new institution for the satisfaction of ordinary wants, and on this basis the patriarchal household became secure and stable. The simple need of food and clothing has changed with all the differentiation of social activity, and its power as a social motive has never been so great as it is to-day. The savage eats when he has game, and it is only the recurring feeling of hunger that rouses him once more to activity. The civilized man feels the power of these stimuli unremittingly, and they are no longer satisfied by what will merely sustain life and protect the body from extremes of temperature. Society has created a higher "standard of living," as it is called, and this determines what food and clothing one needs. The number of courses necessary for dinner depends on position in society; fashion decides what clothing is required; the dwelling-house is not for protection from the weather but for "comfort." These needs can be supplied only in an economic structure that extends over the whole globe; its complexity almost defies analysis; its beginnings lie centuries back. The whole industrial fabric depends on the simple need of food and clothing.

If, then, the needs of the individual, from which all social activities arise, are few and simple in their origin, and remain fundamentally the same in spite of the very different ways in which they demand satisfaction, it should be no difficult task to classify social activities and institutions according to this principle.

III.

In attempting to illustrate the genetic principle of the classification of social phenomena by applying it, I incur the danger of obscuring the principle by faults in its application; none the less such an illustration seems necessary. The general classes of social phenomena, activities, and institutions, that correspond to the simple needs or stimuli, are distinct enough. Industrial, "social" (in the narrower sense of the word), and political phenomena correspond to the three original or essential stimuli from which they spring; intellectual, æsthetic, ethical, and religious phenomena correspond to the derived stimuli. Difficulties do indeed arise from the fact that society is essentially one, so that institutions arising in one form of activity often become potent factors in other forms of activity; the family, which originates in one special phase of man's need of companionship, attains a position of fundamental importance in the industrial and the political world; property, an economic phenomenon, exercises no indirect influence on political life, and indeed on the higher forms of culture:—difficulties do arise from the interrelation of the various social activities, but they are by no means insurmountable when the principle suggested is kept in mind.

We may now take industrial phenomena as an example of the farther application of the genetic principle of classification. The fundamental source of this activity, as we have seen, is the need of food and of protection against cold and wet; on a higher stage of development these become the need to conform to a particular standard of living, and many other desires, such as the love of acquisition and the love of power that comes from wealth, reinforce them; but the test of an industrial phenomenon is its genetic relation to the activity stimulated by these simple needs. In the lowest stage of society of which we can conceive,—if indeed we call it society,—the need of food and protection from the weather is of course present in its full power, but each individual or little

group satisfies it as best it may; one eats the food he gets and wears the skins he has prepared, the economic needs lead to social life but not to a distinctly economic form of social life. There is no *value*, for exchange has not begun; no *wealth*, for each individual or clan satisfies its own needs without coming into comparison with any one else.

The economic activity of society begins when *circulation* first intervenes between the production of what satisfies want and the immediate consumption of such articles. The economist naturally studies first the production of goods, then their distribution and consumption; historically, however, wealth begins with exchange, for it is the circulation of commodities that unites individuals or groups in a common activity which may receive the name "economic." The booty which a successful band of marauders brought home with them naturally led to exchange. Military leaders and their followers would desire to exchange the products of war, such as slaves, for the products of peace. The contact between different tribes, to which war also contributed, enlarged men's world; and gradually they learned that their wants and the wants of their neighbors could be met most easily by exchange.

In the process of exchange two institutions arise, which are very important objects of study for the science that deals with economic phenomena in detail. The first of these is the institution of money. Exchange is immensely facilitated by the use of some recognized standard of value. What this standard is, of course, depends largely on the relative convenience of different possible objects. The object selected takes its place as the standard of value by a sort of social agreement:—it is *money* when it is recognized and received as money. And the new institution reacts on the activity to which it is due. The use of a good standard of value extends the sphere of exchange so that parties far distant from each other can enter into commercial relations; it extends this sphere in time, for the goods exchanged need not be limited

by the present needs of the parties; finally the use of money does away with all the unnecessary labor involved in barter.

The second class of institutions arising in the process of exchange have to do with transportation. The amount of goods exchanged at any given time, and the possible range of a market, depend on the facility with which goods are transported. According to Proudhon, "to draw a loaded cart on the natural soil requires one-quarter or one-fifth of the energy necessary to carry the weight in question; on good roads in ordinary condition only .08 of this amount of energy is necessary; on oak rails the figure is reduced to .022; finally on steel rails in good condition it is only .005 to .003. . . . The increase in distance carried, in rapidity and regularity of transportation can hardly be estimated." The apparatus for the transportation of intelligence, which has grown up from the occasional post to the telegraph and the telephone, has an effect on commerce which is only less important than the institutions just considered. Finally the institutions for the transportation of money have kept pace with the means of transmitting intelligence. For the purposes of business, space and time are all but annihilated and the world is made in reality a single market.

The second standpoint from which we may consider the economic activity of society, ordinarily goes by the name of *consumption*. Before the advent of exchange, a man felt the need of food and labored to secure it; circulation intervenes, and the need to use, i. e. to "consume," certain definite articles becomes the economic motive impelling a man to "produce" articles for which there is an economic demand. It is at this point that the economic stimuli find their direct point of application, and the desire to consume (not the desire for wealth) is the general expression for the motive to economic activity. This motive may be the mere desire to satisfy hunger and protect one's self from cold and wet. Practically, however, the need of food and warmth has been replaced by the need of a thousand and one things which constitute the

standard of living; a carriage may seem more necessary than bread, sealskin garments more necessary than blankets.

The greatest change in the use to which men may put their products occurs when they begin to store them for future use instead of applying them to the satisfaction of immediate desire. The institution of property, the new form of consumption, had humble beginnings and developed but slowly. The vague sense of ownership by the group first became definite in connection with articles worn about the person, clothing, amulets, and especially adornments. The idea of individual property extended rapidly as the idea of individuality developed. Weapons and utensils, and later flocks and herds, came to be reckoned by the tribe as the property of its individual members. Last of all, real estate also came to be reckoned as the property of individuals. The new institution is a new form of consumption, a new use for what is produced. In connection with this there arises a new social stimulus, the love of acquisition. Moreover property means power over one's fellow-men, and the love of power is constantly acquiring a larger range as an economic stimulus, while it loses power as a political stimulus. Such is the reaction of this institution on economic activity, and on the stimuli to which this activity is due.

Once more the economic activity of society may be viewed from the standpoint of *production*. Production for a market follows circulation; men undertake to meet the market demand when this is the quickest and surest way of satisfying their own needs. Property previously acquired must be used in production if it be only to support the producer until he can reap the fruits of his labor in the exchange of his products, so that capital (in the broader sense of the term) has been a constant element in every institution for production.

The institutions by which production has been carried on have varied exceedingly in different ages, and each form has been the basis of a particular type of social life. The earliest organized form of production was some kind of slavery. In-

ertia is an almost universal characteristic of savage races; men only work under compulsion, either spasmodically, under the compulsion of recurring needs, or under the compulsion of superior human authority. Unproductive as slave-labor seems to us, it was a genuine means of production, which was immensely better than none. Feudalism, and the guild-system which in many places succeeded feudalism, were decided advances on slavery. The serf was trained through many centuries of partial freedom until he could accomplish distinctly more in the time which was his own than in the time which was his lord's. The system of production in the home and the small shop, and the system of production in large factories, are later forms which the institutions for production have assumed. The historical classification of types of production, and the classification of institutions for production to-day, are determined by the manner in which each institution has risen from some simpler form that had the same end. And within the general lines thus determined, the degree of complexity is another difference between particular groups for production; from this standpoint also groups for production are classified according to the simpler forms from which they have arisen.

In the present article I have attempted to show: (1) that the scientific classification of social phenomena must start with the recognized fact that they sprang from a few simple sources, and must seek to classify them genetically; (2) that inasmuch as the motive power in society is found in the needs and emotions of individuals, the generally accepted classification of these needs furnishes the key to the natural classification, first of social activities and then of social institutions; and (3) that by the use of this principle a complex set of social phenomena (e. g. the economic phenomena) is defined from other sets of social phenomena, and that the principle is adequate for the further classification of this set of phenomena.