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SELECTED WRITINGS

1. The field of sociology

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

A science which has only just come into existence necessarily has at the outset only an uncertain and ill-defined sense of the area of reality that it is about to approach, of its extent and its limits. It can gain a clearer picture only to the degree that it acquires a procedure to guide its research; and the heightened awareness of its subject matter that it obtains in this way is of the greatest importance. For the task of the scientist is the more secure the more orderly it becomes; and the more methodical it is, the more accurate is the account that he can render of the territory he is penetrating.

Sociology has reached the stage at which it is opportune to make every effort to bring about such an advance. If some reactionary critics, inadvertently influenced by the prejudice which always hinders the formation of a new science, reproach sociology for not knowing the precise subject-matter with which it intends to deal, they can be told that such ignorance is inevitable in the early phases of research, and that our science came into being only very recently. It must not be forgotten, especially in view of the popularity of sociology today, that fifteen years ago it would scarcely have been possible to enumerate as many as ten individuals who could, properly speaking, be called 'sociologists'. We must add to this that it is asking too much of a science to define its subject-matter with excessive precision, for the part of reality that it intends to study is never precisely separated from others. In fact, in nature everything is so closely interconnected that there can be neither a complete division, nor too precise boundaries, between the various sciences. Nevertheless, it is important that we should obtain as clear an idea as possible of what constitutes the domain of sociology, where this domain is to be found, and what indices allow us to recognise the complex of phenomena with which we must deal. However, we must refrain

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- 5 Coser, *op. cit.* p. 213.
- 6 See pp. 205-15.
- 7 ES, p. 105.
- 8 Coser, *op. cit.* p. 216.
- 9 DTS, p. 173.
- 10 *Ibid.* p. 172.
- 11 See pp. 193-4.
- 12 MR, p. 107.

from establishing boundaries in those areas which are necessarily indeterminate. This problem is all the more urgent for our science, because unless we are careful, its province may become infinitely extended: for there is no phenomenon – from physicochemical ones to properly social facts – which does not take place in society. Thus we must accurately distinguish social facts, and show what it is that gives them their identity, if we are to avoid reducing sociology to nothing but a conventional label applied to an incoherent collection of disparate disciplines.

RIS, 1900, pp. 127–8

Whether he proceeds by deduction or by induction, Montesquieu follows a methodological rule that modern science must not overlook.

Social phenomena are usually classified according to considerations which might appear at first sight to be wholly unconnected. Religion, law, morality, trade, and administration seem, indeed, to differ in nature. This explains why each class of phenomena was for a long time treated separately – and sometimes still is: as though it could be examined and explained by itself, without reference to the others, just as physicists do not take colour into consideration when dealing with weight. It is not denied that one class of phenomena is related to the others; but the relationships are regarded as merely incidental, so that, as the inner nature of the phenomena cannot be ascertained, it seems safe to disregard the relations between them. For example, most moralists deal with morality and rules of conduct as though they existed in isolation, and do not bother to consider the economic character of the societies in question. Those who deal with the subject of wealth maintain, in a similar way, that their science, namely political economy, is completely autonomous and can be carried on without paying any attention to the system of rules that we call morality. One could give many such examples.

Montesquieu, however, saw quite clearly that all these elements form a whole and that if each is considered separately, without reference to the others, they cannot be understood. He does not separate law from morality, trade, religion, etc., and above all he does not detach them from the form of society, which affects all other social phenomena. However widely they differ, all of these phenomena express the life of a given society. They are the elements or organs of the social organism. Unless we try to understand how they harmonise and interact, it is impossible to know their functions. We shall fail even to identify their nature, for

they will seem to be distinct realities, each with its independent existence; whereas they are actually parts of a whole. This attitude accounts for certain errors that are still made by many authors. It explains why many political economists have regarded personal interest as the only principle of society and why they have denied that the legislator has the right to intervene in activities related to trade and industry. Conversely, though for the same reason, moralists have generally regarded property rights as fixed and immutable, whereas they actually depend upon extremely varied and changing economic factors.

This error had to be dispelled before social science could develop or even come into existence. The various disciplines dealing separately with different forms of social phenomena did indeed prepare the way for social science; it was from them that it originated. But social science, in the strict sense, came into being only when it was clearly perceived that the branches mentioned above were bound together by strict necessity and were parts of a whole. Such a conception, however, could not arise until it was realised that all events in society are related. In pointing to the interrelatedness of social phenomena, Montesquieu foreshadowed the unity of our science – although his view of the matter was still confused. Nowhere does he say that the problems he deals with might form the subject-matter of a definite science, embracing all social phenomena and having a method and a name of its own. And yet, without being aware of the implication of his efforts, he gave posterity the first sample of such a science. Although he did not consciously draw the conclusions implicit in his principles, he paved the way for his successors who, in instituting sociology, did little more than give a name to the field of study which he inaugurated.

MR, pp. 102–5

... sociology could only become conscious of itself within philosophical thought, far from the specialised disciplines and their influence. Even this characteristic depended upon causes of too profound a nature for it to have lost all *raison d'être* by the time at which the first beginnings of organisation of the science appeared. This is why we should not be surprised to meet with it in Comte's immediate successor, Spencer. It is obvious that Spencer wrote sociology as a philosopher, because he set out, not to study social facts in themselves and for themselves, but to show how the evolutionary hypothesis can be verified in the social realm. But, by that very token, he found himself in a position to

complete or to correct the general conceptions of Comtean sociology upon important points. Although Comte had definitely integrated societies in nature, the exaggerated intellectualism which permeated his doctrine accorded poorly with this rule, which is fundamental to all sociology. If scientific evolution determines political, economic, moral and aesthetic evolution, there is a great distance between sociological explanation, and that which is applied in the other natural sciences, and it is difficult to avoid slipping into ideology. In showing that, in different forms, a single law dominates the social and the physical world, Spencer linked societies more directly with the rest of the universe. He made us aware that, below the phenomena which occur on the surface of the *science collective*, and which express the products of deliberated thought, there operate obscure forces which do not move men through the sort of logical necessity which connect the successive phases of scientific development to one-another. From another aspect, Comte did not accept that there were a diversity of social types. According to him there existed only one society, human association in its entirety; and particular states represented only different moments in the history of this single society. Sociology thus found itself in a situation unique among the sciences since it had as its object an entity which was the only one of its type. Spencer cleared up this anomaly by showing that societies, like organisms, can be classed into forms and types and, whatever the value of the classification which he offered, the principle, at least, deserved to be maintained and has survived. Although they were formulated philosophically, these two reforms hence constituted invaluable acquisitions for the science.

But if this mode of conceiving and of doing sociology was certainly, at a given moment, necessary and useful, this necessity and usefulness was only temporary. In order to come into being, and even to make progress initially, sociology needed to lean upon philosophy; but in order to really become itself, it was absolutely necessary for it to assume another character.

The very example of Comte himself can serve to prove this: for, because of its philosophical character, the sociology which he constructed did not at all satisfy the conditions which he himself demanded of every positive science.

In fact, of the two parts of the science which he distinguished, statics and dynamics, he really only treated the second. Moreover, from his point of view, this was the more important, since if there were, according to him, social facts distinct from purely individual phenomena, this is above all because there is a pro-

gressive evolution of humanity; that is to say because the work of each generation survives it, and comes to be joined to that of the generations which follow it. Progress is the social fact *par excellence*. Now social dynamics, in his exposition, shows none of that continuity and that fruitfulness which, according to Comte's own remark, constitute 'the most definite criteria of all truly scientific conceptions': for Comte himself considered it to be virtually completed by his own work. Indeed, it is contained entirely in the law of the three stages, and, once this law has been discovered, one cannot see how it would be possible to add to it, to extend it and, even less, what different laws could be discovered. Hardly having been founded, the science would already be closed. In fact, those of Comte's disciples who were strictly attached to the content of the doctrine were able to do nothing more than to reproduce the propositions of the master, sometimes illustrating them by new examples, but without these purely formal variations ever having constituted real discoveries. This is what explains the lack of development of the properly Comtist school after Comte; the same formulas were ritually repeated without any progress being realised. The fact is that a science cannot live and develop when it is reduced to a single and unique problem upon which a great mind now and then makes its mark. In order for it to progress, it must be resolved into a progressively expanding number of special questions, in such a way as to make possible the co-operation of different minds and of successive generations. It is only on this condition that it will acquire the collective and impersonal character without which there is no scientific research. Now the philosophical and unitary conception which Comte made of sociology is opposed to this division of labour. Moreover, his social dynamics is at bottom only a philosophy of history, remarkable for its novelty and profundity, but not different in type from that of previous philosophies. It is a matter of perceiving the law which governs 'the necessary and continuous movement of humanity', and which alone makes it possible to introduce into the succession of historical events the unity and continuity which they lack.

RP, 1903, pp. 469-71

There still exist a number of thinkers who do not believe in the future of sociology. Their favourite argument is that they do not perceive that it has any clear objective, divisions, or programme. They mistrust a science which is announced to the world as a newcomer without historical antecedent. And in this they are

quite right — if it were really true, as has sometimes been said; that sociology dated from Auguste Comte. If it was born out of nothing, at that instant, we would share this justifiable mistrust. Revolutions and immediate creations no more exist in the world of science than they do in the world of things. Every being which is born capable of life is the product of a long evolution. But it is an illusion to believe that sociology dates from yesterday and is the fruit of brilliant improvisation. It existed at all times, in a latent and diffuse state. The great service which was rendered by Comte and his school was simply to show the unity of these apparently incoherent researches, to give to social science a name and an individuality, and to integrate it within the system of positive sciences. At all times, economic phenomena, the state, law, morality and religion have been studied scientifically, thus giving birth to five sciences which can rightly be called sociological.

However, it is necessary for them to remain worthy of this designation, which all too frequently they forget. Social science, states Maurice Block, 'only sees *men*, in abstraction from that external tie which is called the state'. In other words, so-called 'social' science should study men by supposing that they do not live in society. It would be better, in fact, to give it another name. We are told that state and society are two different things. Yes, but on one condition: that the state is seen as a wholly external tie, an artificial system which is superimposed upon society, but does not derive from it. This is the simplistic conception of Rousseau, which the economic school stubbornly adhere to, even after a century of experience which has hardly been favourable to the theory of the *Social Contract*. Things are far more complex. A society is not a collection of individuals which an enormous and monstrous machine keeps united and compressed against each other by the use of force. No, solidarity comes from the inside and not from the outside. Men are attached to one another as naturally as the atoms of a mineral and the cells of an organism. The affinity which they hold for each other is based upon sympathy, a feeling the germs of which can be discerned in animal societies; this expands, diversifies, and becomes transformed with progress, but it is no less natural to man than egoism, to which, in the interests of simplicity, the economists would reduce the human mind. Now, at each moment in its development, this solidarity is expressed externally by an appropriate structure. The state is one of these structures. The state is the external and visible form of sociability. To abstract from it is thus certainly, as we have said, to suppose that men do not live in societies. It is to take as an

axiom that there is not and cannot be more than external contacts and transient relationships between men, determined by the necessarily fortuitous connections of interest. It might be objected that abstraction is a legitimate procedure of science. Certainly. But to abstract is to take out of reality a part which one isolates: it is not to create a mental construction out of nothing. Now, the man and society which are conceived of by the economists are purely imaginary, and correspond to nothing in reality. The sociologist will therefore consider economic facts, the state, morality, law and religion as so many functions of the social organism, and will study them as phenomena which occur in the context of a definite, bounded society. From this point of view, things immediately take on a different aspect. By the same token, as we have already seen, political economy loses its autonomy, because one cannot study one social function wholly in isolation from others.

RP, 1886, pp. 78-9

SOCIAL AND NATURAL PHENOMENA

A discipline may be called a 'science' only if it has a definite field to explore. Science is concerned with things, realities. If it does not have a datum to describe and interpret, it exists in a vacuum. Separated from the description and interpretation of reality it can have no real function. Arithmetic is concerned with numbers, geometry with space and figures, the natural sciences with animate and inanimate bodies, and psychology with the human mind. Before social science could begin to exist, it had first of all to be assigned a definite subject-matter.

At first sight, this problem presents no difficulty: the subject-matter of social science is social things: that is, laws, customs, religions, etc. Looking back in history, however, we find that no philosophers ever viewed matters in this way until quite recently. They thought that all such phenomena depended upon the human will and consequently failed to realise that they are actual things, like all other things in nature; they have their own specific properties, and these call for sciences which can describe and explain them. It seemed to them sufficient to ascertain what the human will should strive for and what it should avoid in established societies. Hence what they strove to discover was not the nature and origin of social phenomena, not what they actually are, but what they ought to be; their aim was not to offer us as valid a description of nature as possible, but to present us with the idea of a perfect society, a model to be imitated. Even Aristotle,

who was far more concerned with empirical observation than Plato was, aimed at discovering, not the laws of social existence, but the best form of society. He begins by assuming that the sole objective of society should be to make its members happy through the practice of virtue, and that virtue lies in contemplation. He does not establish this principle as a law which societies actually follow, but as one which they should act upon in order that human beings may fulfil their specific nature. Certainly he does turn later to historical facts, but with little purpose other than to pass judgement upon them, and to show how his own principles could be adapted to various situations. The political thinkers who came after him on the whole followed his example. Whether they wholly disregard reality or pay a certain amount of attention to it, they all have a single purpose: to correct or transform it completely, rather than to know it. They take virtually no interest in the past and the present, but look to the future.

MR, pp. 29-31

The proposition according to which social facts are to be treated as things - which is the very foundation of our method - is one which has stimulated great opposition. It has been considered paradoxical and scandalous for us to assimilate the realities of the social world to those of the external world. Such criticism involves a singular misunderstanding of the meaning and application of this assimilation: the object of this was not to reduce the higher to the lower forms of being, but on the contrary to claim for the higher forms a degree of reality at least equal to that which is readily granted to the lower. We do not say that social facts are material things, but that they are things by the same right as material things, although they differ from them in type.

Just what is a 'thing'? A thing differs from an idea in the same way as that which we know from without differs from that which we know from within. A thing is any object of knowledge which is not naturally controlled by the intellect, which cannot be adequately grasped by a simple process of mental activity. It can only be understood by the mind on condition that the mind goes outside itself by means of observations and experiments, which move progressively from the more external and immediately accessible characteristics to the less visible and more deep-lying. To treat the facts of a certain order as things thus is not to place them in a particular category of reality, but to assume a certain mental attitude toward them; it is to approach the study of them on the principle that we are absolutely ignorant of their nature,

and that their characteristic properties, like the unknown causes on which they depend, cannot be discovered by even the most careful introspection.

With the terms thus defined, our proposition, far from being a paradox, could almost pass for a truism if it were not too often misunderstood in the human sciences and especially in sociology. Indeed, one might say in this sense that, with the possible exception of the case of mathematics, every object of science is a thing. In mathematics, since we proceed from simple to more complex concepts it is sufficient to depend upon mental processes which are purely internal in character. But in the case of 'facts' properly so called, these are, at the moment when we undertake to study them scientifically, necessarily unknown *things* of which we are ignorant; for the representations which we have been able to make of them in the course of our life, having been made uncritically and unmethodically, are devoid of scientific value, and must be discarded. The facts of individual psychology themselves have this character and must be seen in this way. For although they are by definition purely mental, our consciousness of them reveals to us neither their real nature nor their genesis. It allows us to know them up to a certain point, just as our sensory knowledge gives us a certain familiarity with heat or light, sound or electricity; it gives us confused, fleeting, subjective impressions of them, but no clear and scientific notions or explanatory concepts. It is precisely for this reason that there has been founded in the course of this century an objective psychology whose fundamental purpose is to study mental facts from the outside, that is to say as things.

This is all the more necessary in the case of social facts, for consciousness is even more helpless in knowing them than in knowing its own life. It might be objected that since social facts are our own creations, we have only to look into our own mind in order to know what we put into them and how we formed them. But, in the first place, the greater part of our social institutions was bequeathed to us already formed by previous generations. We ourselves took no part in their formation, and consequently we cannot by introspection discover the causes which brought them into being. Furthermore, when we have in fact collaborated in their genesis, we can only with difficulty obtain even a very confused and a very distorted perception of the true nature of our action and the causes which determined it. When it is merely a matter of our private acts we know very imperfectly the relatively simple motives that guide us. We believe ourselves disinterested

when we act egoistically; we think we are motivated by hate when we are yielding to love, that we obey reason when we are the slaves of irrational prejudices, etc. How, then, should we be able to discern with greater clarity the much more complex causes from which collective acts proceed? For, at the very least, each one of us participate in them only as an infinitesimal unit; a huge number of others collaborate with us, and what takes place in these other minds escapes us.

Thus our principle implies no metaphysical conception, no speculation about the fundamental nature of being. What it demands is that the sociologist put himself in the same state of mind as physicists, chemists, or physiologists, when they enquire into a hitherto unexplored region of the scientific domain. When he penetrates the social world, he must be aware that he is penetrating the unknown. He must feel himself in the presence of facts whose laws are as unsuspected as were those of life before the development of biology; he must be prepared for discoveries which will surprise and disconcert him.

RMS, pp. xii-xiv

[Written in review of a work by Jankélévitch concerned with the philosophy of social science.]

Here is yet another book of philosophical generalities on the nature of society - generalities in which it is difficult to discern a close and familiar acquaintance with social reality. Nowhere does the author give the impression that he has entered into direct contact with the facts which he discusses; for we do not believe that the general ideas which he develops are illustrated by a single concrete example, nor applied to a single precise and defined sociological problem. Whatever the skill in argument, or the literary talent, of an author, one cannot denounce too strongly the scandal of a method which flouts in this way all our customary scientific procedures but which, nonetheless, is becoming a very frequent practice. We no longer accept today that one can speculate upon the nature of life without having first been initiated in biological technique; by what privilege should it be permissible for the philosopher to speculate about society, without taking account of the detail of social facts?

The object of the book is to demonstrate that the social sciences are not 'sciences in the true sense of the word, that is to say, assimilable to the natural sciences', and that the phenomena with which they are concerned with are not part of the framework of

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Social and natural phenomena

natural phenomena, but constitute 'something, if not opposed, at least, different'. The author does not mean to understand by this, however, that society is outside of nature, 'not recognising any law, any rule, never repeating itself, and only making itself manifest through a series of hazards and accidents'. He readily sees that such a society is impossible; but he considers nevertheless, that man, as a social being, has the power to resist nature, to escape from laws, to modify them, and to add to them in pursuit of the realisation of certain ends. It is, therefore, the very principle of Comtean sociology and, more generally, of all scientific sociology, which is placed in contention.

As to the demonstration of the thesis, it is contained completely in the two following arguments, which the author reiterates in different forms, but without essential variation. In his exposition, these are often confused; but, although they are of a kind such as to lend themselves to mutual support, we believe that there is some point in distinguishing them and considering them separately.

All the things in nature derive from the category of being; all that can be said of them is that they are, and that they are what they are. This is why the natural sciences have no other objective than to allow us to know *what is*; they do no more than express the real, such as it is manifest to us. But when man appears on the scene, and consequently the society which man is inseparable from, there also appears a new category, which is that of *value*. We do not confine ourselves to knowing what things are; we declare them to be good, bad, indifferent, etc., according to whether they accord or do not accord with our desires, or do not affect them in any way. Here we thus add to nature a property which is not intrinsic to it. We superimpose upon the natural point of view, which is that of science, a new point of view, which is the human point of view. The natural sciences are hence unable to know things from this second aspect. Now, social life is solely made up of values; religious, moral, juridical, economic, and artistic values. Everything, in society, is considered in relation to man. Objects which are materially, as regards their physical properties, of the poorest sort, can have an incomparable social prestige and price, if human judgement attributes it to them. From which it follows that the social sciences cannot be assimilated to the natural sciences.

In the second place, social phenomena can only be explained *historically*; they are all the result of an evolution. Now, what does the idea of evolution imply? That things do not remain identical with themselves; that something new, which did not exist before,

comes into being, appears at a given moment; and social evolution is an uninterrupted succession of new phenomena of this kind. Nature, on the contrary, is, by definition, that which does not change, that which is ever immutable. The subject-matter of the natural sciences is that which repeats itself identically; their role is to discover the laws which are always and everywhere the same, to efface differences, and to show the uniformity beneath the apparent diversity. On this point again, consequently, it does not seem as though they can serve as a model for the social sciences; for history never repeats itself.

From these considerations, it follows that the teleological point of view must predominate in the disciplines which deal with society. If we properly understand the author, they must above all take as their object the construction of ideal ends, to determine what must be valued, and what are — or rather how it is appropriate to consider — the different human values. As to the method which has to be followed in order to proceed to this consideration, no indication is given us.

We are very much afraid that this whole fabric of argument simply rests upon a confused notion.

The author seems to accept as obvious that there only exists one nature, that is to say, physical nature, and that to refuse to admit a radical heterogeneity between the social and the natural sciences is to admit *ipso facto* that the social fact is completely reducible to the properties of matter. For him, nature is the totality of cosmic forces, and it is for that reason that nature and humanity are always presented in his book in antithetical form. Thus understood, the naturalist thesis is easy to refute. The only thing is, that it has never been held, in this form, by any sociologists of any authority: and it would be quite extraordinary that it should have received much credence, because it has as its corollary the very negation of sociology. In any case, since Jankélévitch accords us the honour of choosing us as the principle contemporary representative of the thesis which he opposes, we may be permitted to say that the whole of our work protests against this Eleatic monism. If we have said that societies are in nature, we have sought with no lesser determination to show that social nature is *sui generis*, that it is irreducible, not only to physical nature, but even to the psychic nature of the individual. To declare that societies are natural things, that collective events submit to necessary laws, is thus not to hold that there is nothing new or different in the world. No-one has made greater efforts than us to show that the characteristic changes in social life are quite real

and that, in a general way, the diversity of things is no mere appearance. In this, moreover, we do no more than to follow the path opened up by the founder of positive sociology, by Auguste Comte, who even went so far as to point to a radical discrepancy between the different realms of nature, and even between the different animal species. If, therefore, as every indication shows, it is indeed our method which Jankélévitch intended to oppose in his book, either he is poorly acquainted with it, or he has misunderstood it. It is possible that we are in error, and that one cannot, without contradiction, reconcile the naturalist thesis and the principle of the specificity of social things; but, on the other hand, in order to establish the contrary thesis, one must not forget or ignore the fact that this reconciliation has been attempted by the very doctrine which is claimed to be refuted.

And moreover, one cannot readily see how the character by which our author distinguishes social facts prevents us from treating them according to methods comparable to those employed by the natural sciences. Undoubtedly social life is composed of values, and values are properties added to reality by human consciousness; they are wholly the product of psychic mechanisms. But these mechanisms are natural facts, which can be studied scientifically; these evaluations which human judgement makes of things depend upon causes and conditions which can be discovered inductively. There is thus here the subject-matter of a whole group of sciences which, as with the sciences of physical nature, move from given effects to the causes upon which those effects are dependent: such is the object of the social sciences. And it is only when we know better, in fact, in what these creations and these classifications of values have consisted in the past, what are the mental processes which they result from, the agencies of these processes, etc., that it will be possible to substitute for these empirical, instinctive, evaluations, which are made in an unreflective fashion, more considered and rational methods.

AS, 1906(b), pp. 171-4

THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF SOCIOLOGY

When I carry out my obligations as brother, husband, or citizen, when I comply with contracts, I perform duties which are defined, externally to myself and my acts, in law and in custom. Even if they conform to my own sentiments and I feel their reality subjectively, this reality is still objective, for I did not

create them, I merely received them through my education. How many times it happens, moreover, that we are ignorant of the details of the obligations incumbent upon us, and that in order to get to know them we must consult the law and its authorised interpreters! Similarly, the church-member found the beliefs and practices of his religious life ready-made at birth; if they existed before him, they existed externally to him. The system of signs I use to express my thought, the system of currency I employ to pay my debts, the instruments of credit I utilise in my commercial relations, the practices followed in my profession, etc., function independently of whatever use I make of them. If one were to take, one after the other, all of the individuals who compose society, the preceding statement could be repeated of all of them. Here, then, are ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that present the remarkable property of existing outside the individual consciousness.

These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are, moreover, endowed with an imperative and coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will. Of course, when I conform to them wholeheartedly, this coercion is felt only slightly, if at all, as it is unnecessary. But it is nevertheless an intrinsic characteristic of these facts; this is shown by the way in which it asserts itself as soon as I attempt to resist it. If I attempt to violate legal rules they react against me so as to prevent my act if possible, or to nullify my violation by restoring the damage, if it has been carried out but can be rectified; or to demand expiation if it cannot be compensated for otherwise.

Thus we are able to conceptualise in a precise way the field of sociology. It comprises only a limited group of phenomena. A social fact is to be recognised by the power of external coercion which it exercises or is capable of exercising over individuals; and the presence of this power can be recognised in turn either by the existence of some definite sanction or by the resistance offered against every individual act that tends to contravene it. However one can also define it in terms of its diffusion within the group, provided that, in following our previous remarks, one takes care to add as a second and essential characteristic that it exists independently of the individual forms it assumes in its diffusion. This last criterion is actually, in certain cases, easier to apply than the preceding one. In fact, the constraint is easy to identify when it expresses itself externally by some direct reaction of society, as is the case in law, morals, beliefs, customs, and even

fashions. But when it is only indirect, like the constraint which is exercised by an economic organisation, it cannot always be so easily detected. Generality combined with externality may, then, be easier to establish. Moreover, this second definition is but another form of the first; for if a mode of conduct whose existence is external to individual minds becomes general, this can only be brought about by its being imposed upon them.

Every scientific investigation is directed towards a well-defined group of phenomena, which fall within a single category. The first step of the sociologist, therefore, must be to define the things he treats, in order that his subject-matter may be clearly known. This is the first and most indispensable condition of all proof and verification. A theory can really be tested only if we are able to recognise the facts of which it is intended to give an account. Moreover, since this initial definition determines the very subject-matter of science, this subject-matter will or will not be a thing, depending on the way in which the definition is constructed.

In order to be objective, the definition must obviously deal with phenomena not as mental ideas but in terms of their inherent properties. It must characterise them by an element integral to their nature, not by their conformity to some sort of intellectual ideal. Now, at the very beginning of research, when the facts have not yet been analysed, the only ascertainable characteristics are those external enough to be immediately visible. Those that are more deep-lying are no doubt more significant, and their explanatory value is greater; but they are unknown to science at this stage, and they can be anticipated only by substituting some hypothetical conception in the place of reality. The material included under this fundamental definition must be sought among the external characteristics of phenomena. Moreover, it is clear that this definition must include, without exception or distinction, all phenomena which manifest the same characteristics; for we have no reason nor any means of choosing between them. These properties are our only clue to reality; consequently, they must be given complete sovereignty over the way in which facts are grouped. We possess no other criterion which could even partially justify any exception to this rule.

We may lay down as a principle that social facts are capable of objective representation to the degree that they are completely detached from the individual facts expressing them. In effect, the degree of objectivity of a sensation is proportionate to the degree of stability of its object; for objectivity depends upon the existence of a constant and identical point of reference to which the

representation can be referred, and which makes it possible to eliminate everything which is variable and subjective. But if the points of reference themselves are variable, if they constantly differ in relation to each other, there is no common standard, and we have no way of distinguishing between those impressions which are external and those that are subjective. So long as social life is not separated from the particular events of which it is comprised, and has no separate existence, it will present this dilemma. As these events differ among themselves and change in time, and as social life is inseparable from them, they communicate their changeability to it. Social life then consists of free currents which are constantly in the process of transformation, and cannot be fixed by the observer. The scholar cannot approach the study of social reality from this aspect. But we know that it possesses the power of crystallisation without ceasing to be itself. Apart from the individual acts to which they give rise, collective habits find expression in definite forms: legal rules, moral regulations, popular proverbs, social conventions, etc. As these forms have a permanent existence and do not change with the different applications made of them, they constitute a fixed object, a constant standard of reference for the observer, which excludes subjective impressions and purely personal observations. A legal regulation has an intrinsic identity, and there are no two ways of looking at it. Since these practices are merely social life consolidated, it is legitimate, except where there are contradictory indications, to study the latter through the former.

When, then, the sociologist undertakes the investigation of a given order of social facts, he must endeavour to consider them from an aspect that is isolated from their individual manifestations. It is this principle that we have applied in studying the diverse forms of social solidarity and their evolution, through the medium of the legal structure which expresses them. In the same way, an attempt to distinguish and classify the different types of family on the basis of literary descriptions given us by travellers and sometimes by historians, is exposed to the danger of confounding the most diverse forms and of relating together the most dissimilar types. If, by contrast, the legal structure of the family and, more specifically, the right of succession, are taken as the basis of classification, these are objective criteria which, while not infallible, will prevent many errors. Let us suppose we wish to classify the different sorts of crime. We would have to try to reconstruct the modes of life and the occupational practices that are followed in the different worlds of crime. One would then

recognise as many criminological types as there are different forms of this organisation. To come to grips with customs and popular beliefs, one must take account of the proverbs and epigrams that express them. No doubt, in proceeding thus, we leave the concrete substance of collective life temporarily outside the realm of science; and yet, however changeable and unstable it may be, its unintelligibility cannot be assumed *a priori*. But in order to follow a methodical course, we must establish the initial bases of science on solid ground and not on shifting sand. We must approach the social realm at those points at which it offers the best access to scientific investigation. Only later will it be possible to push research further and, by successive approximations, to encompass, little by little, this fleeting reality, which the human mind will perhaps never be able to grasp completely.

RMS, pp. 3-4, 11-12, 33-5 and 44-6

For the Manchester school, political economy consists in the satisfaction of the needs of the individual, particularly his material needs. In this conception, therefore, the individual is the sole end of economic relationships; it is through him and also for him that everything is accomplished. As for society, this is a mental construct, a metaphysical entity which the scholar can and must neglect. What is called by that name is simply the coming into contact of all the individual activities; it is a composite in which there is nothing more than the sum of its components. In other words, the major laws of economics would be exactly the same even if there had never been either nations or states in existence; they presuppose only the presence of individuals who exchange their products. One sees that the liberal economists are, at bottom, unconscious disciples of Rousseau, whom they reject as in error. They recognise, it is true, that the condition of isolation is not the ideal; but, like Rousseau, they see in the social tie nothing more than a superficial connection, determined by the convergence of interests. They conceive of the nation only as an immense society, through the action of which everyone receives exactly as much as he gives, and in which one remains only as long as one profits from it. It also seems to them good that things should be thus: for too intense a collective life would quickly become a threat to that individual independence which to them is the most precious thing in the world. Moreover, the more consistent among them have not hesitated to declare that national sentiments are only the residue of prejudices which one day are destined to disappear. In these conditions, economic activity can

have no other origin than egoism, and as a consequence political economy becomes radically separated from morality – if indeed humanity retains any moral ideals, once one has dissolved every social bond.

RP, 1887(b), p. 37

2. Methods of explanation and analysis

EMERGENT PROPERTIES

Whenever any elements combine and, by the fact of their combination produce new phenomena, it is evident that these phenomena are not given in the elements, but in the totality formed by their union. The living cell contains nothing but mineral particles, just as society contains nothing but individuals; it is obviously impossible, however, for the phenomena characteristic of life to exist in the atoms of hydrogen, oxygen, carbon, and nitrogen. For how could the properties of life exist within inanimate elements? How, moreover, would the biological properties be divided among these elements? These properties could not exist equally in all the elements because the latter are different in nature; carbon is not nitrogen and consequently can neither possess the same properties nor have the same role. It is similarly inadmissible that each of the principal aspects or characteristics of life be manifest in a different group of atoms. Life could not thus be subdivided; it is a unity, and consequently its basis be only the living substance in its totality. It is in the whole, not in the parts. The inanimate particles of the cell do not feed themselves, reproduce – in a word, live – only the cell itself can do so. What we say of life could be repeated for any type of compound. The hardness of bronze is not in the copper nor in the tin, nor the lead, which served to create it, and which are soft and malleable bodies; it is in their mixture. The fluidity of water and its nutritional and other properties are not in the two gases of which it is composed, but in the complex substance which they form by their association.

Let us apply this principle to sociology. If, as we may accept, the synthesis *sui generis* which every society constitutes yields new phenomena, differing from those which take place in the individual consciousness, we must also admit that these facts reside exclusively in the very society itself which produces them, and not in its parts – that is, its members. Thus they are in this

sense external to individual minds considered as such, in the same way as the distinctive characteristics of life are external to the mineral substances composing the living beings. These new phenomena cannot be reduced to their elements without contradiction in terms, since, by definition, they suppose something other than that contained by these elements. Thus we have a new justification for the separation which we have established between psychology proper, which is the science of the individual mind, and sociology. Social facts do not differ from psychological facts in quality only: *they have a different substratum*. They do not develop in the same milieu; and they do not depend on the same conditions. This does not mean that they are not themselves also psychic in a certain way, since they all consist of ways of thinking or acting. But the states of the *conscience collective* are different in nature from the states of the individual consciousness; they are representations of another sort. The mentality of groups is not the same as that of individuals; it has its own laws. The two sciences are hence as clearly distinct as two sciences can be, whatever connections there may otherwise be between them.

Nevertheless, on this point a distinction can be made which will perhaps throw some light on the discussion.

That the *substance* of social life cannot be explained by purely psychological factors, that is to say, by states of individual consciousness, seems to us to be perfectly evident. Indeed, what collective representations express is the way in which the group thinks of itself in its relation to objects which affect it. Now the group differs from the individual in its constitution, and the things that affect it are of a different nature. Representations or concepts that express neither the same subjects nor the same objects cannot derive from the same causes. To understand the way in which a society represents itself and the world around it, we must consider the nature of the society and not that of the individuals. Even the symbols which express these conceptions change with the society.

If, for example, it conceives itself to be descended from a totemic animal, it is in the form of one of those special groups called 'clans'. If the animal is replaced by a human ancestor, but similarly mythical, it is because the clan has changed its nature. If, over and above local or family divinities, it creates others on which it believes itself to be dependent, it is because the local family groups of which it is composed have tended to concentrate and unite; the degree of unity which is presented by divinities

corresponds to the degree of unity attained at the same moment by the society. If society condemns certain modes of conduct, it is because they transgress certain fundamental sentiments which derive from its constitution, as those of the individual derive from his physical temperament and his mental organisation. Thus, even if individual psychology had no more secrets for us, it could not give us the solution to any of these problems, since they relate to orders of facts of which it has no knowledge.

We must not be surprised, moreover, if other phenomena in nature display, in other forms, the very character by reference to which we have defined social phenomena. This similarity simply derives from the fact that both are real things. For everything that is real has a definite nature that asserts itself, that must be taken into account and is never completely overcome, even when we manage to neutralise it. And, fundamentally, this is the most essential element in the idea of social constraint. For all that it implies is that collective ways of acting or thinking have a reality outside the individuals who, at any moment of time, conform to it. These are things which exist in their own right. The individual finds them already formed, and he cannot act as if they did not exist or were different from how they are. He is therefore obliged to take account of them. It is difficult (we do not say impossible) for him to change them to the degree to which they share in the material and moral supremacy of society over its members. Of course, the individual plays a role in their genesis. But for a social fact to exist, several individuals, at the very least, must have contributed their action; and it is this combined action which has created a new product. Since this synthesis takes place outside each one of us (for a plurality of consciousnesses enters into it), its necessary effect is to fix, to institute outside us, certain ways of acting and certain judgements which do not depend on each particular will taken separately. Thus it has been pointed out that there is a term, which, provided that one extends the ordinary meaning somewhat, expresses this mode of reality quite well: this is 'institution'. One can, indeed, without distorting the meaning of this expression, call *institutions* all the beliefs and modes of conduct instituted by the collectivity. Sociology can then be defined as the science of institutions, their genesis and functioning.

RMS, pp. xvi-xviii and xxii

If, once they come into being, ideas continue to exist independently, without being perpetually contingent upon the arrangement

fact that they were useful does not tell us what brought them into being. Even if we were to explain how we came to conceive of them and to plan them in advance so as to picture to ourselves the services we could expect from them – already a difficult problem in itself – the wishes that led to their creation still did not construct them out of nothing. In short, even admitting that social organisations are the necessary means of attaining a desired objective, the question remains unanswered: from what source and by what means have these been created?

We arrive, therefore, at the following principle: *The determining cause of a social fact must be sought among antecedent social facts and not among states of individual consciousness.* Moreover, we can easily see that everything which has just been said applies to the determination of the function as well as to the cause of social phenomena. The function of a social fact can only be social, that is to say, it consists in the production of socially useful effects. No doubt it may and does happen that it also serves the individual. But this fortunate outcome is not its immediate cause. We can thus complete the preceding proposition by saying: *The function of a social fact must always be sought in its relation to some social end.*

It is because sociologists have often misunderstood this rule and have considered social phenomena from too psychological a point of view that many of their theories seem too vague, imprecise, and far removed from the specific character of the things they are intended to explain. The historians in particular, who treat social reality directly and in detail, could hardly have failed to sense how powerless these over-generalised interpretations are to explain the relation between their data; and their frequent mistrust of sociology has been, no doubt, partly produced by this circumstance. This is not to say, of course, that the study of psychological facts is not indispensable to the sociologist. If collective life does not derive from individual life, the two are nevertheless directly related; if the latter cannot explain the former, it can at least aid in the former: it can at least aid in its explanation. First, as we have shown, it is indisputable that social facts are produced by an elaboration, *sui generis*, of psychological factors. In addition, this very action is similar to that which takes place in each individual consciousness and which transforms the primary elements (sensations, reflexes, instincts) of which it is originally constituted. It is not without reason that it has been said that the self is itself a society, by the same right as the organism, although in a different sense; and long ago psycholo-

gists showed the great importance of the factor of association in the explanation of mental life.

Psychological training, more than biological training, constitutes, then, a necessary preparation for the sociologist; but it will not be useful to him except on condition that he emancipates himself from it after having received it, and then goes further by special sociological training. He must abandon psychology as the centre of his operations, as the point of departure for his excursions into the sociological world to which they must always return. He must establish himself in the very heart of social facts, in order to observe them directly, asking the science of the individual mind only for a general preparation and for useful suggestions where these are needed.

RMS, pp. 109–11

Perhaps these comparisons will clarify why we insist so strongly upon the distinction between sociology and individual psychology.

It is simply a matter of introducing and making acceptable in sociology a conception parallel to that which is tending to prevail more and more in psychology. During the last decade considerable advance has been made in that science. Interesting efforts have been made to establish a psychology which is actually 'psychological', without any other qualifying adjective. The old introspectionists were content to describe mental phenomena without trying to explain them; psycho-physiology explained them but dismissed their distinctive traits as unimportant. A third school is coming into being which is trying to explain them without destroying their specificity. For the former school mental life certainly had a nature of its own, but it was one that lifted the mental out of the world of reality, and placed it above the ordinary methods of science. For the second school it was of no intrinsic significance, and the role of the scientist was to pierce this superficial layer in order to arrive at the underlying realities. Neither school recognised anything more than a thin curtain of phenomena which, according to the first, was readily visible to the conscious mind and to the second, was lacking in any consistency. Recent research has shown us that it is far better to conceive of it as a vast system of *sui generis* realities made up of a great number of mental strata superimposed upon each other, far too profound and complex for the conscious mind to penetrate, far too specialised to be accounted for by purely physiological considerations. We thus characterise psychological facts by their *spirituality*. This seemed in the past to be either

above or below the attentions of science, but has itself become the object of a positive science; between the ideology of the introspectionists and biological naturalism, a psychological naturalism has been founded, the legitimacy of which the present work will, perhaps, help to demonstrate.

A similar transformation should take place in sociology, and it is towards this goal that all our efforts are directed.

SP, pp. 45-7

[Written in review of Tardé's attempt to found an 'interpsychology'.]

Towards the end of his life, Tardé liked to replace the term 'collective psychology' by that of 'interpsychology'. The first expression seemed to him to be ontologically suspect, as it appears to imply that there is a psychology proper of the collectivity. Since, according to the author, there is no reality apart from the actions and reactions exchanged between individuals, it is necessary that the name of the science itself should indicate that it has no other object. It is not the case that all interpsychic relations are social. The impressions which the sight of another person can evoke in me have nothing social about them. There must be in addition an action exercised by one mind upon another mind, having the effect of producing in the latter a certain mental state. But neither is every reciprocal mental act social; there are some which are rather obstacles to the social tie, for example, hatred, or fear, or the appetite of a cannibal. Only suggestion involving sympathy, confidence, or obedience, has a truly social character.

One can already see how arbitrary and confused this notion is. First of all, if interpsychology really comprises phenomena which are not social, it is certainly a poor method which mixes within the same category two categories of phenomena which are so clearly distinct. Moreover, why refuse to allow that sentiments such as fear and hatred can have the character of social facts? If hatred separates, it also unites, in the same way as, if sympathy unites, it separates. These two occurrences are correlative with each other; and what an unsatisfactory definition it is which places them in two distinct categories, and attributes them to two different sciences!

This conception is even arbitrary in the division and the framework of the science. The major problems which the science is to be concerned with are the following: 1. The effect of an individual

upon an individual. 2. That of an individual upon an assembled crowd, and vice versa. 3. That of an individual upon a public or a diffuse crowd, and vice versa. But in order to study the effect of an individual upon a crowd, or of a crowd upon an individual, it is necessary first to know what a crowd is, and how its mentality is formed. Can the genesis of this mentality be reduced to simple inter-individual actions? This question cannot be settled in advance, when the science has not yet got under way. Evidently the author supposes that the crowd is made by a leader: this simplification disposes of any difficulty, but cannot, however, be accepted as evidence. Now this is exactly the problem; one wonders whether Tardé has any inkling of it.

Let us add in conclusion that these problems are singularly vague, and it is difficult to see how it is possible to approach them methodically. In what way, by what observations, are we to approach the study of the influence of an individual upon an individual, of an individual upon a crowd, etc? Are we going to limit ourselves, as has been done up to now, to collecting a few freely adapted anecdotes? Is this the way to carry out scientific work? There are crowds of all sorts, publics of all sorts; each one has its own particular way of reacting. It would be necessary to distinguish these, to find some way to observe objectively the way in which they behave, and to look for the conditions in relation to which they vary. But such special and definite researches immediately direct thought in quite a different direction from vague interpsychology.

One will find at the end of Tardé's article a proof of the circle in which his thinking moves. According to him, as we already know, all social phenomena derive from the unilateral or reciprocal effect of the contact of minds: imitation is the fundamental type of such an effect. Now, without having perceived the vicious circle, the author indicates in concluding his work that this effect is itself promoted or hindered by social causes. In other words, imitation, the source of social life, itself depends upon social factors; it presupposes what it produces. Men only act upon each other, for example, in such a way as to produce social facts, when there is already a sufficient moral homogeneity between them, which is a result of life in common. Men imitate their superiors, but superiority is already a social institution; so it is the case that the word 'imitation' is empty and explains nothing. We must discover why men imitate, and the causes which lead men to imitate, to obey each other, are already social.

AS, 1905, pp. 133-5

HISTORY, FUNCTION AND CAUSE

History can only be a science on condition that it raises itself above the particular; but then it is the case that it ceases to be itself, and becomes a branch of sociology. It merges with dynamic sociology. History can remain a distinct discipline only if it confines itself to the study of each individual nation, taken by itself, and considered at the different moments of its development. But it is then no more than a narrative, which is mainly practical in objective. Its function is to put societies in a position to remind themselves of their past; it is the most distinctive form of collective memory. Having distinguished these two conceptions of history, it should be added that, more and more, they are destined to become inseparable. There is no longer any conflict between them but only a difference in degree. Scientific history, or sociology, must be founded upon the direct observation of concrete facts and, on the other hand, national history, history as art, can only gain through being penetrated by the general principles arrived at by the sociologist. For in order for a people to know its past well, it is still necessary to select from the multitude of phenomena in order to retain only those which are particularly vital; and in order to do that, we must have criteria, thus presupposing comparison. In the same way, in order to be able to discover with greater certainty the way in which the concrete events in a definite period of history are linked together, it is useful to know the general relationships of which specific relationships are instances and as if so many applications. There is not in reality, therefore, two separate disciplines, but two different points of view which, far from excluding each other, mutually presuppose each other. But this is no reason to confuse them, and to attribute to one what is a characteristic of the other.

AS, 1902(b), pp. 124-5

As soon as history becomes a comparative discipline, it is indistinguishable from sociology. Sociology, in turn, not only cannot do without history but needs historians who are, at the same time, sociologists. As long as sociology has to sneak like a stranger into the historical domain in order in some way to steal from it the facts in which it is interested, it cannot derive much profit from it. Finding itself in an unfamiliar context, one in which it has no roots, it is almost inevitable that sociology should be unable to perceive, or should see only vaguely, that which it actually has the greatest stake in observing with particular clarity. The

historian, on the other hand, is accustomed to dealing with historical fact and handles it with ease. Thus, however antagonistic they may be, these two disciplines naturally tend to move toward one another, and everything suggests that they will be called upon to fuse into one common study, which recombines and unifies elements of both. For it appears equally impossible that the historian — the student whose role it is to discover facts — should neglect the comparisons which make use of this material, as that the sociologist, who compares them, should neglect how they have been discovered. To produce historians who know how to see historical facts as sociologists do, or — which amounts to the same thing — to produce sociologists who have mastered all of the techniques of history, is the objective which must be striven for from both sides. In this manner, the explanatory formulas of sociology will progressively extend to the whole universe of social facts, instead of reproducing only their most general outlines; and, at the same time, historical scholarship will become meaningful because it will be employed to resolve the most important problems which face mankind.

AS, 1897(a), p. iii

It is a very widely held notion that whoever occupies himself with practical matters must partly turn himself away from the past in order to concentrate the whole weight of his attention upon the present. Since the past is no more, since we have no effect upon it, it seems that it can merely have the interest of curiosity for us. It is, so it is believed, the domain of scholarship. It is not what was, but what is, which we must know and, better still, it is what is tending to happen that we must seek to predict in order to be able to satisfy the needs which impel us. . . In point of fact, the present, in which we are invited to enclose ourselves, is nothing if taken alone; it is no more than the prolongation of the past, from which it cannot be separated without in large part losing its whole meaning. The present is formed of countless elements, which are so completely entangled with one another that it is not easy for us to perceive where one begins and the other finishes, what each one is, and what connections there are between them; thus immediate observation gives us only an incoherent and confused conception of them. The only way to distinguish and to separate them, and hence to introduce a little clarity into this confusion, is to seek in history how they came progressively to be conjoined one to the other, to combine and acquire an organized form. In the same way as our perception of matter made it

appear to us as homogeneous mass, until scientific analysis showed us its true composition, so the direct perception of the present does not allow us to suspect its complexity, until it has been revealed to us by historical analysis. But what is even more dangerous is the undue importance which we are thus prone to attribute to the aspirations of the present moment, when we do not submit them to control. For, precisely because they are of the present, they hypnotise us, absorb us, and prevent us from being aware of anything other than ourselves. The awareness which we have of something which we need is always very strong; hence it tends to assume a preponderant place in our minds, and throws all else in the shadow. Completely enveloped by the object towards which we are directed by our desires, it appears to us as the most precious thing in existence, that which matters above everything, the ideal to which all else must be subordinated. Now very often what we want in this way is not more essential, or is less essential, than that which we have; and we thus risk sacrificing really vital necessities to passing and secondary needs.

EPP, pp. 22-3

To show how a fact is useful is not to explain how it was created or why it is as it is. The uses which it serves presuppose the specific properties characterising it, but do not create them. The need we have of things cannot give them their specific nature, or cause them to come into being. It is to causes of another sort that they owe their existence. The idea we have of their utility may indeed motivate us to put these forces to work and to elicit from them their characteristic effects, but it will not enable us to produce these effects out of nothing. This proposition is evident so long as it is a question only of material, or even psychological, phenomena. It would be equally undisputed in sociology if social facts, because of their extreme intangibility, did not - mistakenly - appear to us without all intrinsic reality. Because we usually see them as purely mental constructions, it seems to us that they may be produced at will whenever we find it useful. But since each one of them is a force, which dominates the individual, and since it has its own characteristic nature, it is not true that they can be brought into existence merely by an effort of the will. It still necessitates the development of forces capable of producing this specific force. To revive the spirit of the family, where it has become weakened, it is not enough that everyone understand its advantages; the causes which alone can produce it must be made to act directly. To give a government the authority which it needs,

it is not enough to sense that this authority is necessary; we must have recourse to the sources from which all authority is derived. We must, namely, establish traditions, a common spirit, etc.; and for this it is necessary again to go back along the chain of causes and effects until we find a point where human action may effectively intervene.

What shows plainly the dualism of these two orders of research is that a fact can exist without serving any end, either because it has never been adjusted to any vital end or because, after having been useful, it has lost all utility while continuing to exist by force of habit alone. There are, in fact, more survivals in society than in the organism. There are even cases where a practice or a social institution changes its function without thereby changing its nature. The rule, *Is pater est quem iustae nuptiae declarant*, has remained in our code essentially the same as it was in the old Roman law. But while its purpose then was to safeguard the property rights of a father over children born to the legitimate wife, it is rather the rights of children that it protects today. The custom of taking an oath began by being a sort of legal test and has become today simply a solemn and imposing formality for a witness. The religious dogmas of Christianity have not changed for centuries, but the role which they play is not the same in our modern societies as it was in the Middle Ages. Thus, the same words may serve to express new ideas. It is, moreover, a proposition true in sociology, as in biology, that the organ is independent of the function - in other words, while remaining the same, it can serve different ends. The causes of its existence are thus independent of the ends it serves.

However, we do not wish to argue that the impulses, needs, and desires of men never intervene actively in social evolution. On the contrary, it is certain that they can advance or retard its development, according to the circumstances which determine the social phenomena. But even apart from the fact that they cannot, in any circumstances, make something out of nothing, their actual intervention, whatever may be its effects, can take place only by means of efficient causes. A deliberate intention can contribute, even in this limited way, to the production of new phenomena only if it has itself been newly formed or if it is itself a result of some transformation of a previous tendency. For, unless we postulate a truly providential and pre-established harmony, we cannot admit that man has carried with him from the beginning - potentially ready to be awakened at the call of circumstances - all the tendencies which conditions were destined

to demand in the course of human evolution. Now a tendency is itself something objectively real; it can, then, neither be created nor modified by the mere fact that we judge it useful. It is a force having a nature of its own; for that nature to be given existence or altered, it is not enough that we should find this profitable. In order to bring about such changes, there must be causes acting which physically produce them...

Thus when we undertake to explain a social phenomenon, we must seek separately the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfils. We use the word 'function', in preference to 'end' or 'purpose', precisely because social phenomena do not generally exist for the useful results they produce. What we have to do is to determine whether there is a correspondence between the fact under consideration and the general needs of the social organism, and in what this correspondence consists, without occupying ourselves with whether it has been intentional or not. All such questions of intention moreover, are too subjective to allow of scientific treatment.

Not only must these two orders of problems be separated, but it is convenient, in general, to treat the former before the latter. This sequence, indeed, corresponds to that given in reality. It is natural to seek the causes of a phenomenon before trying to determine its effects. This method is all the more logical since the first question, once answered, will often help to answer the second. Indeed, the bond which unites the cause to the effect is reciprocal to an extent which has not been sufficiently recognised. The effect can no doubt not exist without its cause; but the latter, in turn, needs its effect. It is from the cause that the effect draws its energy; but it also restores it to the cause on occasion, and consequently it cannot disappear without the cause showing the effects of its disappearance.

RMS, pp. 90-2 and 95

SOCIAL MORPHOLOGY

The specialisation which is demanded if sociology is to become a truly positive science does not therefore entail a kind of grand construction which has no historical precedent; on the contrary, it is the natural outcome of a long development. It is not a matter of inventing and creating new disciplines, hitherto unknown, out of nothing; in large degree, it is sufficient to develop a certain number of existing sciences in the direction in which they are spontaneously moving.

But however real this spontaneous evolution, what remains to be done is not inconsiderable. The necessary preparatory work has been done, but it is not yet finished. Because scholars in the specialised disciplines are directly in contact with factual materials, they have a strong sense of the diversity and complexity of things and, consequently, they are not inclined to be satisfied with simplistic formulas and facile explanations; but, on the other hand, since they have not first taken an overall view of the ground to be explored, they are somewhat haphazard, and are not fully aware of the objective to be attained, or of the direct relationships which unite them and which make them colleagues in the same enterprise. The consequence of this is that, in many ways, they are unable to formulate a conception of their science which is really adequate to its objective.

In the first place, because these different disciplines exist in separation from each other, and almost without being aware of each other, the way in which they have divided up the social world is not always consistent with the nature of things. Thus, for example, geography and demography (or the science of population) until recently remained separate from one-another, and are only just beginning to become interrelated. However, both study the same subject-matter, in order to understand the material substratum of society; for what is it which forms the main substance of society, if it is not social space plus the population which occupies this space? In this there are two orders of phenomena which are inextricably related: a society is of greater or lesser density according to the extension of the land over which it is distributed, according to the shape of this land, the number or direction of the waterways, according to the position of the mountain ranges, etc. On the other hand, the external forms of social groups have changed over time, and it is the historian, ordinarily, who studies these changes. For example, the origin and development of rural and urban groupings is a problem which usually is considered to be the concern of history. However, in order to be able properly to understand the actual nature and function of these groups, issues which occupy the demographer, it is absolutely necessary to know about their origins, and the conditions of these. There is thus a whole group of historical studies which is inseparable from demography and consequently also from social geography. Now it is not merely to create a pleasingly ordered science that there is some point in removing these fragmentary researches from their state of isolation: rather, as a consequence of their integration, new problems are brought to light which

would not otherwise be perceived. Ratzel's approach, which is characterised precisely by its sociological point of view, which forms his starting point, has successfully demonstrated this. Because he is an ethnographer and an historian at the same time as he is a geographer, he has been able to see, for example, that the diverse forms which the frontiers of countries have assumed can be classed into a certain number of different types; he has subsequently sought to determine the conditions which give rise to these. It thus seems possible to unite all the varied researches which deal with the material substratum of society within a single science; elsewhere, we have proposed to call this science *social morphology*. Conversely, it would be easy to show that other disciplines, which are only indirectly related to one-another, are confused in a way which produces an amalgam which has no intrinsic unity. Who could say precisely what the *Kulturgeschichte* of the Germans, or their *Völkerpsychologie*, or their *Volkskunde*, consist in? How could such composite researches, formed of such disparate elements, practise even a loosely defined method? For the nature of a method, being always directly related to the nature of its object, cannot be more clearly defined than the latter is.

But this same state of dispersion has another consequence, which is perhaps more general: it prevents these various sciences from being social, except in name alone. Indeed, if this term is not to be a mere label applied to them, they must be based upon the fundamental principle that all the phenomena which they are concerned with are social; that is to say, are manifestations of one and the same reality — society. The observer should retain only those which have this characteristic, and they should be explained in terms of the mode in which they derive from the nature of society, and the specific way in which they manifest this. But if the various specialists remain enclosed in their respective specialities, it is impossible for them to come to collaborate under the guidance of this fundamental notion; for since each studies only a part of the totality, which he takes to be the totality itself, he fails to reach an adequate conception of this totality, which is society. He holds that the phenomena which he is concerned with are social because they are manifestly the product of human association; but society is only very rarely considered as the determining cause of the events for which it forms the stage. We have stated, for example (in a previous section of the article), that the science of religion has made considerable progress, but it is still extremely unusual for religious systems to be treated as deter-

mined by definite social systems. Religious beliefs and practices are still presented to us as the product of sentiments which originate and develop in the consciousness of the individual; only in their expression, because it is external, do they take on a social form. Impressions left in the mind by the spectacle of the great cosmic forces, by the experience of sleep or of death, thus form the main substance of religion. The anthropology of law, for its part, while declaring that law is a social function, is mainly preoccupied with connecting it to certain qualities of human nature in general. The writers in this school have seen in the similarities which exist between the legal institutions of different societies proof that man possesses a single legal consciousness; and it is this primary and fundamental consciousness which they have sought to discover. This is to posit *a posteriori* a natural law, prior to the formation of societies, which would seem logically to be part of the moral consciousness of every human individual. From this point of view, social factors can only be referred to in order to show how this primitive and universal source becomes differentiated in detail according to particular national differences. As to political economy, we are aware that the general propositions, which it terms 'laws', were for a very long time treated as independent of any characteristics of time and space, and consequently of any collective states. It is true that recently, with Bücher and Schmoller, economic science has moved in a new direction, with their formulation of types of economy. But these attempts are still isolated ones, and their method, moreover, is still very unclear. In Schmoller's writings particularly we see procedures and ideas of very different origin mingled in a rather confused eclecticism.

Even the principle of the interdependence of social facts, although easily accepted in theory, is far from being effectively put into practice. The moralist still studies moral phenomena as if they were separable from the legal phenomena of which they are, however, merely one variety. On the other hand, it is very rare to find jurists who realise that law cannot be understood apart from religion, from which it has taken its major distinctive characteristics and of which it is, in part, simply a derivation. Conversely, historians of religion do not generally feel the need to examine the religious beliefs and practices of different peoples in relation to their political organisation. Sometimes, however, when a specialist has managed to understand that the facts which he deals with are bound up with other collective manifestations, he feels obliged to refashion his point of view and to integrate

all the special sciences which he needs to make use of in his research. Schmoller has done this in his *Grundriss der allgemeinen Volkswirtschaftslehre*. This is a complete sociology, seen from the economic point of view. One can see how tenuous such a synthesis necessarily tends to be, since it is summarily assembled from quite heterogeneous studies, which demand an equally heterogeneous range of special skills. Only the spontaneous co-operation of all of these specific sciences can give to each one something of an accurate notion of the relations which pertain between it and the others.

Thus although these sciences are tending more and more to orient themselves in a sociological direction, this orientation still remains in many ways ambiguous and unconscious. The pressing problem which faces sociology, we believe, is that of working to make this a more conscious process, to further it, and to give it greater precision. We must make the sociological idea penetrate these different approaches which, although they no doubt arise spontaneously, do so only at a slow pace, as if groping in the dark. On this condition, the Comtean conception will cease to be an idea, and become a reality. For the unity of the social realm cannot find adequate expression in a few general philosophical formulæ, totally removed from the facts and from detailed researches. Such a unity can only operate through the agency of a body of distinct and interdependent sciences, which, however, are aware of their interdependence. Moreover, it can be foreseen that, once organised, these sciences will return with interest to philosophy what they have borrowed from it. For the shared conceptions which will emerge from the relationships established between them, which will form the core of the unity which will thus be established, will provide the subject-matter of a revitalised social philosophy, a social philosophy as positive and progressive as the very sciences whose crowning endeavour it will be.

RP, 1903, pp. 493-6

[Written in review of a work by Ratzel.]

We have already had occasion to indicate here [in the *Année sociologique*] the importance which we attribute to the work of Ratzel. Not only are his books full of interesting and ingenious ideas, but he possesses the great merit of having rescued geography from the state of isolation in which it was languishing, and of turning it into a genuinely social science; and he has therefore opened up the way to promisingly fruitful research. But we have

to make the same comment about his *Anthropogeographie* which we have already made when reviewing his *Politische Geographie*. If the science which Ratzel is seeking to found is extremely thought-provoking, his objective as well as his method still remain very unclear. We have seen above [in the present review] that it is not easy to say definitely what it is exactly concerned with. Undoubtedly the theory of migratory movements is the central part of it; but many other subjects are discussed. In brief, it is concerned to study all of the influences which the soil may have upon social life in general. Now the diverse problems which present themselves according to the standpoint are much too heterogeneous to be dealt with by one science alone. The nature of the soil, climate, etc., has certainly exerted an influence over collective representations, myths, legends, the arts etc.; but it is the task of the sociology of religion to study them from this aspect. The same causes act upon the characteristics of nations: the problems posed in collective ethnology derive from this. Certain features of economic life depend upon the flora and fauna; it is the economist who should be conscious of this. The configuration of the land facilitates or inhibits the concentration of population; consequently demography cannot be abstract from this phenomenon. A single scholar hence cannot be equally competent to deal with such a diverse range of problems. This is why *Anthropogeographie* leaves the reader with a rather messy impression. It provides a whole series of considerations which are worthy of further thought; but the connections between these are not always apparent. Above all only a small number of defined laws emerge from it.

Furthermore, when such a multitude of facts of every kind are surveyed with the sole aim of indicating the role which the geographical factor plays in producing them, the result is necessarily to exaggerate its importance, precisely because other factors, which also influence the development of these same phenomena, become lost to view. No doubt geographical influences are far from being of negligible significance; but they do not seem to have the sort of preponderance that has been claimed for them. They help to shape what one might call the idiosyncratic qualities of different peoples – their disposition, or the particular characteristics of their temperament and their organisation. But, to our knowledge, there is not one of the constituent elements of social types which can be accounted for in this way; in any case, we find nothing of this sort demonstrated in Ratzel's book. Moreover, how could this be possible, since geographical conditions vary from one

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place to another, while we find identical social types (abstracting from their individual peculiarities) at the most diverse points on the globe?

Nor is it proven that this limited influence is of the same intensity at different moments of history. It appears that it is tending to become increasingly weaker. Religious beliefs in the less developed societies show the imprint of the soil upon which they are formed; today, the truths of science are independent of any local context. Thanks to improved communications, fashions, tastes and the customs of different regions become more and more homogeneous. In order to meet this objection, and to show how societies, even the most developed, depend directly upon their territorial base, Ratzel observes that a major European nation is more seriously affected if it loses a part of its territory, even if empty of inhabitants, than if a corresponding part of its population is taken over. In effect, as nations increasingly involve the land in their life and transform it for their own use, it becomes, to the same degree, increasingly difficult to separate them from it. The only thing is, that if in this case there is indeed still a relation of dependence, it is almost the converse of that which is found originally. If now society is linked to the land, this is not because it has come under its influence, but, on the contrary because it has incorporated it within itself. Far from it being the case that society models itself upon the land, it is the land which bears the imprint of society. Thus it is not the land which explains man, it is man which explains the land; and if it remains important for sociology to be aware of the geographical factor, this is not because it sheds new light on sociology, but because the former can only be understood in terms of the latter.

AS, 1899, pp. 556-8

3. The science of mor

THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF M

There is not a single system of ethics derived from an initial idea in which it is implicit. Some believe that ethics are implicit. Others, by contrast, believe that ethics are explicit in the course of history. But the empiricists as well as the rationalists are wrong. Ethics, as for the details of legal systems, as if they had no existence in themselves, are applications of this fundamental subject-matter of the sciences of life, varied somewhat. The subject-matter of the sciences of life, the precepts, which has no reality, are derived and applied. Furthermore, all ethics refer not to things but to actions. They have not yet arrived at the representations of physical things. They themselves and express them. Ethics derives from the observations of things which are functioning under our eyes. It follows that these rules, and not the subject-matter of physics, should be the subject-matter of ethics, and not the layman's ideas. The result is that ethics is in fact merely its supposition in the individual consciousness. It is only to the most general problems of particular issues. From the fundamental issues, the moralist

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