



The Problem of Sociology

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THE PROBLEM OF SOCIOLOGY¹

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If it is true that human knowledge has evolved out of practical necessities, because knowledge of the true is a weapon in the struggle for existence, both as opposed to extra-human existence, and in the competition of human beings with one another—it is at all events long since released from immediate dependence upon this origin. Instead of a mere means to action, knowledge has become an ultimate end (*endgültiger Zweck*). Still, cognition, even in the autonomous form of science, has not everywhere broken off relationships with the interests of practice, although these relationships now appear to be not mere consequences of the practical interest, but reciprocities between two independent realms.² For scientific cognition does not merely offer itself in technology for realization of external devices, but also, on the other hand, it proposes to itself the problem of theoretical insight into both the internal and external facts of reality. New tendencies of thought often appear, with the purely abstract character

¹This is a portion of the first chapter in Simmel's *Soziologie*, a brief notice of which appeared in this *Journal*, Vol. XIV, p. 544. The translation is as literal as possible. The notes, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.—ALBION W. SMALL.

²An unfortunate way of putting it. If Simmel means only to bring out the fact that modern scholars pride themselves on treating knowledge as an end in itself, the proposition is a commonplace. If he means that the end-in-itself valuation of knowledge is final, or even a complete conception in the sense implied in the following sentence, we enter exception No. 1.

of which, nevertheless, only the interests of a new feeling and willing mingle in the proposing of questions and the forms of intellectuality. Accordingly, the claims which sociology is wont to make are the theoretical continuation and reflection of the practical power which, in the nineteenth century, the masses had gained, in contrast with the interests of the individual. The reason why the sense of importance and the attention, which the lower classes have forced from the higher, are carried by precisely the concept, "society," is that, on account of the social distance, the former appear to the latter not as individuals but only as a unified mass, and that this very distance creates the appearance that the two classes are in principle connected with each other only in the one respect that together they constitute a "society" (*Gesellschaft*). Along with this reciprocal class-consciousness, which came into being with the perception of being a society, rather than through appreciation of the significance of the individual, thought all at once became aware that, as a general proposition, every individual phenomenon is determined by innumerable influences from its human environment. This thought even gained retroactive force, so to speak. By the side of present society, that of the past appeared to be the substance which gave being to the separate existence, as the sea to the waves. In this way the soil seemed to be gained from whose energies alone the specific forms into which it built up the individuals became explicable. This thought tendency was reinforced by modern relativism, that is, the inclination to resolve the specific and the substantial into reciprocations. In other words, the individual was only the spot at which social threads joined; the personality was only the way in which this joining occurred. Inasmuch as we brought ourselves to the consciousness that all human activity ran its course within society, and that nothing can withdraw itself from the influence of society, it followed that everything which was not science of external nature must be science of society. Society appeared as the inclusive territory, in which ethics and history of civilization, aesthetics and demography, politics and ethnology, congregated; since the subject-matter of these sciences occurred within the framework of society. That is, the science

of man was science of society. This conception of sociology as science of everything human was supported by the fact that it was a *new* science, and in consequence all possible problems, which could not find a place elsewhere, crowded to it—as a newly opened territory is always at first the *Dorado* of the homeless and the unattached. The at first unavoidable indefiniteness and indefensibility of boundaries afford right of asylum to everybody. More closely examined, meanwhile, this throwing together of all previous fields of knowledge begets nothing new; it merely signifies that all historical, psychological, normative sciences are dumped into one great pot, on which we paste the label “Sociology.” That would amount merely to the gaining of a new *name*, while everything which it signifies is already secure in its content and its relationships, or is produced within the previous provinces of investigation. The fact that human thought and action occur in society, and are determined by it, as little makes sociology the all-embracing science of the same, as chemistry, botany, and astronomy can be made contents of psychology because their phenomena in the last analysis are actual only in human consciousness, and are subject to the presuppositions of the same.³

³ These are extremely plausible propositions, and there is a sense in which they are valid; but a little reflection shows them to be so ambiguous that they might easily be taken by sceptics about sociology as a confession of judgment against it. By the same kind of reasoning we might make havoc of all our valid scientific differentiations. For instance, no matter how many sciences there may be of things which have quantitative relations, we “dump them all into one great pot on which we paste the label” *mathematics*. In one sense we create nothing new when we generalize all known quantitative relations into an abstract science of quantity. In another sense we do create something entirely new. That is, any conceivable knowledge of the concrete things which have quantitative relations would be partial, if these relations had not been made in their turn the object of special attention. Viewing them with primary reference to quantitative relations alone, that is, abstracting their quantitative relations for particular investigation, makes of them something entirely new for thought purposes. The same thing happens when we dump everything which may have been mathematically classified into another “great pot,” and label it *physics*, or again when we do the same for all things which have the traits that lend themselves to mathematical and physical generalization, and label the next “great pot” *chemistry*. In other words, it is childish to contend against the elementary knowledge that a shifting of the center of attention reconstructs as much of

At the basis of this error is a misunderstood but nevertheless very significant fact. The perception that in his whole nature, and in all its expressions, man is determined by the fact that he lives in reciprocal relationship with other men, must inevitably lead to a new way of thinking in all so-called psychical sciences. It is no longer possible to explain the historical facts in the broadest sense of the word, the contents of culture, the types of industry, the norms of morality, by reference solely to the individual, his understanding, and his interests. Still less is it possible, if this sort of explanation fails, to find recourse in metaphysical or magical causes. With reference to *speech*, for example, we no longer confront the alternative that it was either the universe as remains in view from the new point of interest. This primary perception refutes Professor Simmel's contention in this way: Conceding for the sake of argument that some division of knowledge has already taken account of every type of phenomenon in which association occurs, or which occurs in association (a concession which I would by no means make, except provisionally), there remains, a priori, the same demand for a science which shall generalize the phenomena of association as there would be, after the science of physics had generalized all its phenomena, for a science that should generalize all those relations of the same substances which do not come within the purview of physics, which are, however, involved in all physical occurrences—namely, the relations which are signified by the term *chemistry*. There is a point of view which looks out upon the processes of association in general and seeks to analyze human experience in terms of these associational processes. In so far as this purpose is realized, something new is brought into being in the same sense in which the physicist's universe and his science of the universe is added to by the chemist, and the chemist's by the biologist's, and the biologist's by the psychologist's.

Simmel's figure—"dumping into a big pot"—is unfortunate, as it seems to accuse his fellow-sociologists of something of which they are not guilty. There may have been sociologists whose conception of a feasible method might fairly be described in these terms, but I am unable to name one. So far as I am aware, all the sociologists who have looked forward to a reconstruction of the social sciences have had in mind, vaguely perhaps, but in an essentially valid way, some new analysis and synthesis of the phenomena of association, which, if successful, would have resulted in something as distinct from the results of previous social sciences as chemistry is from physics or economics from ethnology. Nobody understands all this better than Simmel, as we shall be reminded later. It is a curious commentary upon the exigencies of a conventional situation that he finds it necessary to take recourse in a kind of special pleading which does more to discredit his fellow-sociologists than to establish his own position. We shall see presently that this dumping-in-the-pot argument fails after all to arrive at the conclusion intended.

invented by individuals of genius, or that it was a gift of God to men. In *religious systems* the inventions of sly priests, and immediate revelation no longer divide the credit, etc. Instead of these things we now believe that historical phenomena are to be explained by the reactions and co-operations between the individuals, by the aggregation and sublimation of countless separate contributions, by the incorporation of the social energies in structures which exist and develop over and above the individuals. Sociology accordingly, in its relationships to the existing sciences, is a new *method*, an auxiliary to investigation, a means of approaching the phenomena of all these areas in a new way.⁴ This being the case, sociology is related to the older disciplines not otherwise than, in its time, *induction*, which, as a new principle of investigation, invaded all possible sciences, acclimated itself in each, and helped each to new solutions of the tasks within its field. Induction was not for that reason a special science, not to say an all-comprehending science. No more can these claims be urged upon like grounds for sociology. In so far as sociology rests its claims on the ground that man must be understood as a social being, and that society is the vehicle of all historical experience, it contains no *object* which is not already treated in one of the existing sciences. The actual situation is that sociology proposes only a *new way* for all these sciences, a method of science, which, for the very reason that it is applicable to the totality of the problems, is not a peculiar science in and of itself.⁵

⁴It would have been more felicitous, as well as more convincing, if the dumping-in-the-pot discussion had been suppressed, and this way of putting the case had been made the point of departure.

⁵Between this paragraph and the following Simmel begs a fundamental methodological question and proceeds as though the alternative which he prefers were no longer debatable. That is, he dismisses the idea of sociology as a method, and assumes that there is a place for sociology only as a particular science of some hitherto neglected material. I simply decline to accept this conclusion. In this, of course, I differ with many, perhaps most of the sociologists. It is not necessary to settle that question here. Either way, the point with reference to Simmel's jump at a conclusion in the present passage remains. It seems to me as clear as daylight that our traditional social sciences are pitiable abortions, and that they can be vitalized only by reconstruction according to a method which psychologists and sociologists are more interested than anyone else in perfecting. Whether the *name* sociology will be used for this

What then can the peculiar and new subject-matter (*Object*) be, the investigation of which constitutes sociology an independent and precisely delimited science? It is obvious that for such legitimation as a new science, it is not necessary that sociology should have discovered an object (*Gegenstand*) the existence of which had previously been unknown. Everything which we characterize as *object* in the most general sense, is a complex of definitions and relationships, each of which, impressed upon a plurality of objects, may become the subject-matter of a special science. Each science rests upon an abstraction, since it regards the totality of any given thing, which totality we can grasp as a unity through no one science—it regards this totality from one of its aspects, from the viewpoint of some particular concept. In antithesis with the totality of the thing and with things in general, each science grows through a decomposition of the unity and a corresponding division of labor, by virtue of which each thing is resolved into specific qualities and functions, after a concept is reached which is competent thus to resolve the thing into these factors and to grasp the latter according to methodological correlations, whenever they occur in the real things. Thus, for example, the linguistic facts, which we now combine as the material of comparative linguistic science, have for a long time occurred incidentally to phenomena which have been scientifically treated. That particular science had its origin with the discovery of the concept under which these facts, hitherto scattered in examples occurring in various languages, belong together in a unity and are governed by special laws. In similar fashion sociology, as a special science, might find its special object in the fact that it merely draws a new line through facts, which, as such, are quite method or not, will be decided by usage which cannot be dictated by the preferences of this generation. Such a mere verbal detail is not worth worrying about. The important thing is progress toward reconstructing our insight into experience by means of the psychologico-sociological method which is now developing. Whether the name sociology remains in our vocabulary or not, research into human experience to the limit of the demands of this psychologico-sociological method must go on at any cost. It is incalculably more important than discovery of a pocket-borough to be claimed under the name sociology. Even if a thousand such minor scientific territories are staked out in the future, the necessity for the reconstruction referred to will be all the more imperative.

well known. The only thing lacking might be the concept which now for the first time might be brought into action to make known the side of these facts lying along this line, and to display them as constituting, from the viewpoint of scientific method a unity, because of these newly systematized common relations.⁶ In presence of the highly complex facts of historical society, which cannot be interpreted from a single scientific viewpoint, the concepts *politics, economy, culture*, etc., beget such categories of cognition. It may be that these concepts combine certain parts of these facts, with elimination or merely accidental co-operation of the other parts, into a unique historical sequence. It may be that these concepts make intelligible the groupings of elements which, irrespective of the specific here and now, contain a timelessly necessary correlation. If now there is to be a sociology as a special science, the concept of *society*, as such, apart from the external aggregation of the phenomena, must subject the socio-historical data to a new abstraction and co-ordination. This must go to such an extent that certain peculiarities of the data already observed in other relations should be recognized as belonging together and consequently as constituting the subject-matter (*Objekte*) of a science.

Such a point of view results from an analysis of the idea of society, which may be characterized as a *discrimination between form and content of society*.⁷ We must accentuate the fact, however, that this is here properly only an analogy, for the sake of

⁶ Here Simmel adopts precisely the argument which I urged above against the dumping-in-the-pot fallacy.

⁷ Simmel is quite within his rights in making this abstraction of *social forms* the subject-matter of a special science. He is doing an invaluable service by his analysis of the social forms. He asserts below, however (p. 297), that there is no other possible subject-matter for a special science of sociology. Waiving altogether the previous question, namely, special science versus comprehensive method, all that is valid in Simmel's reasoning, or in any other reasoning pertinent to the subject, would point to *social processes* as equally obvious and much more important subject-matter of a social science. I appreciate Simmel's work on the abstraction which he prefers, and am too much interested in things that are more vital to waste further words on the use of labels. There is something worth fighting for, however, in the proposition that, whatever the value of a special science of social forms, it can get its highest value only as a tributary to the more final science of *social processes*.

approximately designating the elements to be distinguished. This antithesis should be understood immediately in its peculiar sense, without prejudice to these provisional names from remoter meanings of the terms. I start then from the broadest conception of society, the conception which so far as possible disregards the conflicts about definitions; that is, I think of society as existing wherever several individuals are in reciprocal relationship. This reciprocity arises always from specific impulses, or by virtue of specific purposes. Erotic, religious, or merely associative impulses, purposes of defense or of attack, of play as well as of gain, of aid and instruction, and countless others bring it to pass that men enter into ways of being-together—relationships of acting for, with, against one another, in a correlation of conditions; that is, men exercise an influence upon these conditions of association and are influenced by them. These reactions signify that out of the individual bearers of those occasioning impulses and purposes a unity, that is, a “society,” comes into being. For unity in the empirical sense is nothing other than reciprocity of elements. An organic body is a unity because its organs are in a relationship of more intimate interchange of their energies than with any external being. A *state* is *one* because between its citizens the corresponding relationship of reciprocal influences exists. We could indeed not call the world *one* if each of its parts did not somehow influence every other, if anywhere the reciprocity of the influences, however mediated, were cut off. That unity, or socialization, may, according to the kind and degree of reciprocity, have very different gradations, from the ephemeral combination for a promenade to the family; from all relationships “at will,” to membership in a state; from the temporary aggregation of the guests in a hotel to the intimate bond of a mediaeval guild. Everything now which is present in the individuals—the immediate concrete locations of all historical actuality—in the nature of impulse, interest, purpose, inclination, psychical adaptability, and movement of such sort that thereupon or therefrom occurs influence upon others, or the reception of influence from them—all this I designate as the content or the material, so to speak, of socialization. In and of themselves, these materials with which

life is filled, these motivations which impel it, are not social in their nature. Neither hunger nor love, neither labor nor religiosity, neither the technique nor the functions and results of intelligence, as they are given immediately and in their strict sense, signify socialization. On the contrary, they constitute it only when they shape the isolated side-by-sideness of the individuals into definite forms of with-and-for-one-another, which belong under the general concept reciprocity. Socialization is thus the *form*, actualizing itself in countless various types, in which the individuals, on the basis of those interests—sensuous or ideal, momentary or permanent, conscious or unconscious, casually driving or purposefully leading—grow together into a unity, and within which these interests come to realization.

In every given social situation, content and societal form constitute a unified reality. A social form can no more attain existence detached from all content, than a spatial form can exist without a material of which it is the form. These are rather the actually inseparable elements of every social being and occurrence—an interest, purpose, motive, and a form or manner of the reciprocity between the individuals through which, or in the shape of which, that content attains social reality.

That which constitutes “society” in every hitherto current sense of the term is evidently the thus indicated types of reciprocal influencing.⁸ Any collection of human beings whatsoever becomes “society,” not by virtue of the fact that in each of the number there is a life-content which actuates the individual as such, but only when the vitality of these contents attains the form of reciprocal influencing. Only when an influence is exerted, whether immediately or through a third party, from one upon another, has a society come into existence in place of a mere spatial juxtaposition, or temporal contemporaneousness or succession of individuals. If, therefore, there is to be a science, the object of which is to be “society” and nothing else, it can investigate only these reciprocal influences, these kinds and forms of

⁸I am surprised that Simmel finds it worth while to pay so much attention to the statical term “society,” instead of finding it more profitable to put the emphasis on the process-concept “association.”

socialization.⁹ For everything else found within "society" and realized by means of it, and within its framework (*Rahmen*), is not "society" itself, but merely a content which builds or is built by this form of coexistence, and which indeed only together with "society" brings into existence the real structure, "society" in the wider and usual sense. That these two factors, inseparably united in reality, shall be separated in scientific abstraction, that the forms of reciprocity or socialization shall be brought methodologically under a unifying scientific viewpoint, in mental detachment from the contents through which alone they become socially actual—this seems to me the sole and the whole possibility of founding a special science of society as such. Only with such a science would the facts which we characterize as the socio-historical reality be actually projected upon the plane of the purely social.¹⁰

Now, however urgently such abstractions, which alone bring science into being out of the complexity or the unity of reality, may be demanded by the subjective needs of cognition, some legitimation for them must also reside in the structure of the objectivity itself; for only in a functional relationship of some sort to actuality can protection exist against unfruitful inquiries, against an accidental character of the concepts that pass as scientific. Mistaken as it is for a naïve naturalism to assume that the thing given already connotes the analytic or synthetic arrange-

⁹At this point Professor Simmel appears to be partially aware of the *non sequitur* in his arguments. He can save himself only by the *tour de force* in the last sentence, "society and nothing else." Pressing this proviso to the most literal extreme, constructing a statical abstraction, and making it an object of thought, he of course, by the terms of the hypothesis, excludes analysis of everything except the mere statical forms which the abstraction has assembled. This abstraction, however, is not the reality of human experience, but merely its ghost. The moment he returns to life from this spectral region, he has occasion to pass from visions of astral bodies to analyses of vital processes.

¹⁰The foregoing paragraph is a capital illustration of the point which I tried to make in *General Sociology*, pp. 184, 185, 504, 508: namely, that the word "society" is worse than useless as a term of precision. We are far enough in analysis to see that we can do justice to our actual distinction, only by using some term of *process*, e.g., "association," or "associating." This would not be a mere verbal variation. It would be, and would advertise, a distinct advance in thought.

ments through which it becomes the content of a science, yet the delimitations which it actually possesses are more or less conformable to those arrangements (*Anordnungen*)—somewhat as a portrait fundamentally transforms the natural human appearance, and yet the one countenance stands a better chance than another of fitting into this radically alien composition. So we may measure the better or worse right of those scientific problems and methods. Thus the right to subject the historico-social phenomena to analysis according to form and content, and to bring the former into a synthesis, must rest upon two conditions, which may be verified only from the facts themselves. On the one hand it must be found that similar forms of socialization occur with quite dissimilar content, for wholly dissimilar purposes; and *per contra* that interests similar in content clothe themselves in quite unlike forms of socialization, as their bearers or species of realization. A parallel appears in the fact that like geometrical forms occur with different substances, while like material occurs in the most various spatial forms; or again in the fact that there is the same variation between logical forms and the cognitive content which they convey.

Both things are now as facts undeniable. In the case of human associations which are the most unlike imaginable in purposes and in total meaning, we find nevertheless similar formal relationships between the individuals. Superiority and subordination, competition, imitation, division of labor, party structure, representation, inclusiveness toward the members and at the same time exclusiveness toward non-members, and countless similar variations are found, whether in a civic group or in a religious community, in a band of conspirators or an industrial organization, in an art school or in a family. However diverse, moreover, the interests may be from which the socializations arise,¹¹ the *forms* in which they maintain their existence may nevertheless be similar. Then, second, that interest which is one

¹¹ Simmel is constantly making unintended, but for that reason all the more significant, concessions to my claims, by dropping into use of process-concepts in place of form-concepts when he wants to be most exact. His word here is *Vergesellschaftungen*.

and the same in *content*, may display itself in very diversely formed associatings. E. g., the economic interest realizes itself both through competition and through deliberate organization of the producer, now through detachment from other economic groups, now through attachment to them; the religious contents of life, while remaining identical in substance, demand now a free, now a centralized community form; the interests which lie at the foundation of the relations of the sexes get their satisfaction in more varieties of family formations than can be enumerated; the pedagogical interest leads now to a despotic relation of teacher to pupil, now to individualistic reactions between teacher and each pupil, now to more collectivistic relations between the former and the totality of the latter. Just as the form in which the most diverse attempts occur may be identical, so the stuff may persist, while the associating of the individual which is the vehicle of this stuff may move in a variety of forms. Thereby, although in their objective concreteness stuff and form constitute an indissoluble unity of the social life, the facts furnish precisely that legitimation of the sociological problem which demands the identification, systematic arrangement, psychological explanation, and historical development of the pure forms of association.

This problem is in direct contrast with that in accordance with which the special social sciences have been hitherto created. The division of labor between them was determined entirely by the variety of the contents.¹² National economy and church polity, the history of pedagogy or of morals, politics or theories of sexual relations, have divided the realm of the social phenomena among themselves so that a sociology which would comprehend the aggregate of these phenomena, with their interpenetrations of form and content, could prove itself to be nothing else than a correlation (*Zusammenfassung*) of these sciences. So long as

¹² This should be qualified. The ostensible division has been on this basis. The division has always been proved to be impossible in practice, and the history of the social sciences would furnish forth a pathetic joke-book of the wallowings of scholars trying to make their definitions afford firm footing among the facts.

the lines which we draw through historical reality, in order to divide it into separate regions of research, connect only those points which mark similar interest-contents—so long will this reality fail to afford any room for a special sociology. There is needed rather a line which, intersecting all those already drawn, detaches the pure fact of associating, in all its manifold forms, from its connection with the most various contents, and constitutes this fact its peculiar sphere.¹³ Sociology will thereby become a special science in the same sense, in spite of the differences of methods and results, in which epistemology is a special science. The latter has abstracted the categories or functions of cognition as such from the multitude of cognitions of specific things. Sociology belongs in the type of sciences whose special character consists not in the fact that their object belongs with others under a higher order of generalization (like classical philology and Germanistics, or optics and acoustics), but rather in that it brings a whole realm of objects under a particular point of view. Not its object but its manner of contemplation, the peculiar abstraction which it performs, differentiates it from the other historico-social sciences.

The concept "society" covers two meanings which, for scientific treatment, must be kept strictly distinct.¹⁴ "Society" is, first, the complex of associated individuals, the socially formed human material, as the full historical reality has shaped it. "Society" is, second, the sum of those forms of relationship by virtue of which individuals are changed into "society" in the former sense. In a parallel way we use the word "cube" (*Kugel*), first for material in a definite form, second, in the mathematical sense, for the mere shape or form by virtue of which the cube in the former sense comes into being through the shaping of mere material.

¹³ I have often pointed out that sociology must either select some minute block of work on some neglected "content," or it must carry out a programme upon a different plane from that of the older divisions of labor in the social sciences. Cf. discussion with Professor Hoxie, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XIII, pp. 1, 209, 392, 399.

¹⁴ The discussion which follows adds cogency to the claim urged above that the attempt to rescue the word "society" from merely popular convenience, for use as a term of precision, is worse than futile.

If we speak of social sciences according to the former sense, their object is everything which occurs in and with society. Social science in the latter sense has as its matter the forces (*sic*),¹⁵ relationships, and forms, through which human beings arrange themselves in association, which thus in independent exhibition (*in selbstständiger Darstellung*) constitute "society" *sensu strictissimo*. Of course, this is not altered by the circumstance that the content of socialization, the special modifications of its material purpose and interest, often or always decide about its specific formation. It would be wholly mistaken to object that all these forms—hierarchies and corporations, competitions and forms of marriage, friendships and societary customs, autocracy and oligarchy—are merely occurrences which we may call "constellative" in already existing societies: that is, if a society were not already present the pre-condition and the opportunity would be lacking for the occurrence of such forms. This representation takes its rise in view of the fact that in every known association a great number of such forms of combination, that is, of socialization, are operative. If, consequently, a single one of these disappeared, "society" would still remain, and thus it may appear, in the case of each particular one, that it came as a variation of an already complete society or had its rise within one. If we eliminate in thought *all* these particular factors, no society remains. Only in and through such reciprocal relationships, called forth by certain motives and interests, does society come into being.¹⁶ True as it is, therefore, that the history and the laws of the so-occurring aggregated structure are the affair of social science (*Gesellschaftswissenschaft*) in the wider sense, yet since social science has already split up into special social sciences, there remains for a sociology in the more restricted sense, i. e., in the sense which proposes a special task, nothing (*sic!*) but consideration of the abstracted forms, which do not so much

¹⁵ Here Simmel seems to me to estop his own restriction of subject-matter to the *forms*. I shall return to this below, p. 304.

¹⁶ By such casual concessions as this Simmel again invalidates his own restriction of the science of socialization to the mere *form* of socialization, instead of extending it to include the more fundamental consideration of the "motives and interests" which produced the forms.

bring socialization to pass as more strictly speaking *are* socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*);¹⁷ "society," in the sense which sociology can apply, is consequently either the abstract general concept for these forms, the genus of which they are the species, or the sum of the same in operation at a given time. It follows further from this concept that a given assortment of individuals may be a society in a greater or a lesser degree. With each new growth of synthetic formations, with each construction of party groups, with each combination for common work, or in common feeling and thinking, with each more decisive assignment of serving and ruling, with each convivial meal, with each self-adornment to impress others, the same group becomes more "society" than it was before.¹⁸ There is never in existence "society" in an absolute sense, i. e., of such a sort that all these particular phenomena would occur in accordance with "society" as a presupposition; for there is no such thing as reciprocal influencing in an absolute sense, but merely particular species of the same. With the occurrence of these species society also puts in an appearance. They are, however, neither the cause nor the consequence of society. *They are themselves immediately society.* Only the unsearchable richness and abundance of the reciprocal influences operative at every moment have given to the general concept "society" an apparently independent historical reality. Perhaps this hypostatizing of a mere abstraction is the secret of the peculiar inflation and uncertainty which have gone along with this concept, and with previous treatments of general sociology—just as there was no real progress with the concept *life* so long as science looked upon it as a unitary phenomenon of immediate reality. Only when the specific processes within organisms, the sum or the interweaving of which is life, were investigated, only when it was recognized that life consists alone in these peculiar occur-

¹⁷ This is an obvious *non sequitur*. *Why* do the *forms* only remain, when Simmel makes it equally evident that the *forces* behind the forms have failed to receive scientific attention?

¹⁸ And by the same token it marks an amateurish state of science to imagine that we are promoting precision by keeping in service a term "society," which confessedly has such an indefinitely sliding scale of meanings. We need an activity-concept in place of a status-concept to meet the requirements.

rences in and between the organs and cells, did the science of life gain firm footing.¹⁹

Only along this line is it possible to reach a precise conception of what is really "society" in society, just as geometry first determines, in the case of things in space, what their extension (*Räumlichkeit*) really is. Sociology as theory of the sociality (*Gesellschaft-Sein*) of humanity, which (humanity) may also in countless other respects be an object of science, is accordingly related to the other special sciences as geometry to the physico-chemical sciences of matter: geometry considers the form through which matter in general becomes empirical bodies—the form which, to be sure, in and of itself, exists only in the abstraction, precisely like the forms of socialization. Both geometry and sociology resign to other sciences investigation of the contents, which manifest themselves in their respective forms, or of the totality of phenomena whose mere form geometry or sociology observes.

It scarcely need be said that this analogy with geometry extends no farther than to the elucidation of the principal problem of sociology. Geometry has the initial advantage of dealing with the extremely simple structures, into which the more complicated figures may be resolved. Consequently the whole range of possible formations is to be construed from relatively few fundamental data. No even approximate resolution of the forms of socialization into their simplest elements is likely to occur in the immediate future. The consequence is that the social forms, even if they should be to some extent determined, would correspond only to a relatively limited range of phenomena. If, for example, it be asserted that super- and sub-ordination is a formation which is found in almost every case of human association, very little is gained with this general cognition. What is required is rather investigation into the particular species of superiority and sub-ordination, and into the special forms of their realization, which naturally lose extent of validity in the degree of their precision.

¹⁹ I cannot understand how Simmel could have written this last sentence and still have retained his conviction that the social *forms* are the *only* subject-matter left for sociology.

We are today accustomed to confront every science with this alternative: Is it devoted to the discovery of timelessly valid laws, or does it attempt to exhibit and explain historically actual occurrences? This alternative does not exclude innumerable intermediary phenomena, and accordingly the problem-conception here defined is not from the start affected by the necessity of the decision of the question. This object, abstracted from reality, may be viewed from the one side with reference to its conformities to laws, which, residing purely in the actual structure of the elements, maintain an indifferent attitude toward their realization in time and space. They apply indeed whether the historical actualities present them in force once or a thousand times. On the other hand, every form of association may be regarded with reference to their occurrence in a *there* and *then*, i. e., with reference to their historical development within definite groups. Determinations of this latter character would be, so to speak, the historical end. In the former case it would be derivation of inductive material for the discovery of timeless uniformities. With reference to *competition*, for example, we meet it in countless varieties in the most varied connections: in politics and in economic management, in the history of religion and of art, etc. The point is to determine from these facts what competition means as a pure form of human behavior, under what circumstances it comes into existence, how it develops, what modifications it undergoes through the peculiar character of its object, through what contemporary formal and material delimitations of a society it is intensified or the reverse, how competition between individuals differs from that between groups—in short, what sort of relationship between persons competition is, inasmuch as it may involve all sorts of contents, yet by the likeness of its appearance along with great variety of contents it proves that it belongs to a sphere governed by its own laws, a sphere which may with propriety be abstracted from other spheres. The similar elements in complex phenomena are thus raised into prominence as by a cross-section. The dissimilar elements, in this case the interests which constitute the content of the relation, are reciprocally paralyzed. We have to deal in a corresponding way with all the

great relationships and reactions which form human association: with the formation of parties, with imitation, with the construction of classes, circles, secondary subdivisions, with the incorporation of the social reciprocities in special structures of material, personal or ideal sorts, with the growth and the rôle of hierarchies, with "representation" of aggregates by individuals, with the significance of community hostility for the inner coherence of the group. Attached then to such cardinal problems, and likewise determining the forms of the groups, there are on the one hand more specialized, on the other hand more complex facts. In the former class we may name, for example, the meaning of the "non-partisan," of the "poor" as organic members of the societies, the fact of the numerical limitations of the group elements, *primus inter pares* and *tertius gaudens*. As more complex occurrences we may name the intersection of many social circles in particular individuals, the special significance of the "secret" in the formations of groups, the modification of the characters of groups according as they are composed of people who belong together locally, or of dispersed individuals, etc.

As already indicated, I waive the question whether an *absolute* similarity of forms occurs along with variety of contents. The approximate likeness which the forms exhibit under circumstances which are materially quite dissimilar, as well as the reverse, suffices to make the conception of complete likeness possible *in principle*. In the concrete, the difference between actual historical occurrences in the psychic realm, occurrences whose fluctuations and complexities defy rationalization, and certain other objects of thought, is evidenced in this very fact that the former are not realized without remainders (*restlos*). This fact may be brought out more distinctly by contrast with geometry, which can with absolute precision separate the forms subject to its idea from the matter by means of which they are actualized. It is also to be kept in view that this likeness in type of reaction, regardless of variety in the human or material substance in reaction, and *vice versa*, is primarily only an auxiliary to the work of achieving and justifying the scientific discrimination between form and content. Methodologically this would also be

demanding, even if the actual constellations did not permit completion of that inductive process which crystallizes the like elements in unlike phenomena; just as the geometrical abstraction of the spatial form of a body would be justified, even if the body thus formed occurred as a matter of fact only once in the world. That this involves a difficulty in procedure is inevitable. Suppose, for instance, the fact before us is that toward the end of the Middle Ages certain heads of guilds, on account of the extension of trade relations, were forced to new means of obtaining materials, to the appointment of associates (*Gesellen*), to new means for attracting customers, which were inconsistent with the older guild principles. More particularly, suppose we have in mind the ancient guild tradition that every master should have the same living (*Nahrung*) as the others, and that the masters now sought to place themselves outside the previous narrow unity. Respecting the purely sociological form, abstracted from the special content, this signifies that expansion of the circle with which the individual is connected by his actions goes hand in hand with a more pronounced expression of the individual peculiarity, with a greater freedom and reciprocal differentiation of the individuals. Now, so far as I am able to see, there is no certainly effective method of wringing its sociological meaning from that complex fact realized through its content. We confront in this case the questions, What purely sociological configurations are contained in the historical occurrence? What special reactions of individuals are involved, in abstraction from the permanent interests and impulses in the individual, and from the conditions of a purely objective sort? These questions are not only answerable in various ways in a given case, but the historical facts which guarantee the actuality of the defined sociological forms must be cited in their totality, and the means are lacking for making instructive the decomposition of this totality into the stuff-factor and the formally sociological factor; and under some circumstances the means are lacking for carrying out this analysis. The case is like proof of a geometrical theorem by means of the unavoidable casualness and crudeness of a figure drawn for the purpose. The mathematician, however, can now reckon that the

concept of the ideal geometrical figure is known and effective, and is now regarded as the only essential significance of the chalk or ink marks. In the sociological case, however, the corresponding presumption may not be made. The disentanglement of that which is actually the pure socialization from the complex of mass phenomena cannot be accomplished by logical means.

We must here assume the odium of alluding to intuitive processes—far as the thing now in mind is from the intuition presupposed by speculative metaphysics. We must speak of a special direction of insight by means of which the discrimination in question is accomplished, and to which approach may be made only by use of examples, until the discrimination can later be composed into methods that are capable of expression in precise concepts, and that are sure guides. This difficulty is enhanced by the facts, first, that no unquestioned technique is conceivable for the application of the fundamental sociological concept; and second, that, even where this concept is really a working device in the case of many factors of the occurrences, classification of cases under the concept, or under the concept of definiteness of the content of the occurrences, often remains arbitrary. To what extent, for example, the phenomenon of the “poor” is of a sociological nature, that is, an outcome of the formal relationship within a group, determined by the general currents and dislocations necessarily produced in contacts of human beings; or whether poverty is to be regarded as a merely material condition of certain separate existences, is an alternative about which contradictory opinions are possible. The historical phenomena as a whole may be looked at with reference to three principal standpoints; viz., *first*, with reference to the individual existences that are the real bearers of the conditions; *second*, with reference to the former types of reaction, which, to be sure, are actualized only in the person of individuals, but now are contemplated not with reference to these individual existences, but only with reference to their relationships of *together*, *with*, and *for* one another; *third*, with reference to the conceptually formulable contents, of conditions and occurrences, in the case of which the question is not now as to their bearers, or the circumstances of their bearers,

but rather as to their purely material (*sachlich*) significance, as to economy and technique, as to art and science, as to legal norms and the products of the emotional life. These three points of view constantly entangle one another. The methodological necessity of keeping them separate is ever and again crossed by the difficulty of setting each in a series independent of the others, and by desire for a composite picture of reality which shall harmonize all the views. Moreover, it can never be determined once for all how deeply the one of these views interpenetrates the other, founding and founded by in turn. Hence, with all possible clearness and definiteness of principle in the proposing of problems, ambiguity is unavoidable. It will appear that the handling of particular cases belongs now in one category now in another; and even within its proper category it may never be securely set off from treatment according to the procedure more peculiar to another. I hope, however, that the method of the sociology which I am here commending will emerge more surely, and even perhaps more clearly, from exposition of its concrete problems than from this abstract introduction. In things of the mind, indeed, it is not infrequent—in case of the most general and profound problems it is rather of general occurrence—that the portions which, in the use of unavoidable analogy we must call the foundation, are less secure than the superstructure erected upon it. Scientific procedure too, especially in fields not previously opened up, can scarcely dispense with a certain amount of instinctive performance, the motives and norms of which can only subsequently arrive at completely clear consciousness and conceptual criticism. And little as scientific labor may ever be completely satisfied upon a basis of vague instinctive treatment of details, yet science would be condemned to sterility if, in presence of new tasks, a completely formulated methodology were the condition of taking the first step.

Within the range of problems marked off by discrimination of the forms of associative reciprocity from the total phenomena of society, portions of the researches thus offered already lie quantitatively, so to speak, outside of the tasks which would otherwise be recognized as sociological. If, for example, we now for

the first time definitely propose the question as to the actions and reactions between the individuals, the aggregate of which reciprocities transmutes that coherence into society, there will at once appear a series, we might even say a world of such forms of relationship, which have hitherto not been included in social science at all, or if included have not been seen in their essential and vital significance. On the whole, sociology has virtually confined itself to those social phenomena in the cases in which the reciprocating forces are formed, at least into conceptual unities, by crystallization of their immediate bearers. States and labor unions, priesthoods and types of families, economic and military organizations, guilds and parishes, class stratification and division of labor, these and similar great organs and systems seem to constitute society, and to fill out the scope of the science of society.²⁰ It is obvious that the greater, the more significant, the more dominant a range of social interest and action is, the more readily such exaltation of the immediate inter-individual living and working to the character of an objective structure, to an abstract existence over and above the several and primary processes, will take place. Yet this calls for important completion in two directions. Besides these far-visible phenomena, imposing in their extent and external impressiveness, there are innumerable minor forms of relationship and types of reciprocation between persons, apparently trivial in their separate instances, but constituting an aggregate which may not be despised, especially since they are the factors which, inserting themselves into the comprehensive, official formations, so to speak, bring society as we know it into existence. Limitation of science to the formal relationships is analogous with the older gross anatomy, which confined itself to the major, definitely circumscribed organs—heart, liver, lungs, stomach, etc.—and neglected the innumerable, vulgarly unnamed and unknown tissues, without which those more obvious organs would never have become a living body. From the structures of the sort named, which constitute the traditional subject-matter of the social sciences, the actual life of society as we encounter it

²⁰ In spite of his explanations below, Simmel will have to qualify this proposition still more in justice to the social psychologists.

could never have been constructed. Without the intermediate operation of innumerable syntheses, in particular less extensive, to which the following researches are to be in large part devoted, there would be only innumerable discontinuous systems. That which makes scientific determination of such obscure social forms difficult is the very thing which makes them immeasurably important for the deeper understanding of society: that as a rule they are not stereotyped in rigid superindividual structures, but that they exhibit society as it were *status nascens*. This is not to assert that we have to do, under the categories here in mind, with the absolutely primordial, historically unsearchable beginnings; but with that which occurs every day and hour. Socialization between persons incessantly takes place and ceases, an eternal flowing and pulsing, which links the individuals together even where it does not go as far as real organizations. Thus we have to do in this connection with the microscopic-molecular occurrences, so to speak, within the human material, which occurrences, however, are the actual occurring (*Geschehen*) which concatenates or hypostatizes itself as the macrocosmic permanent unities and systems. That people gaze at one another and are jealous of one another; that they exchange letters or dine together; that, apart from all tangible interests, they affect one another sympathetically or antipathetically; that gratitude gives to the altruistic act an after effect which is an inseparable bond of union; that one asks another to point out the way, and that people dress and adorn themselves for one another's benefit—all the thousand relationships playing from person to person, momentary or permanent, conscious or unconscious, transitory or rich in consequences, from which these illustrations are quite casually chosen, bind us incessantly together. At each moment threads are spun, dropped, taken up again, displaced by others, with still others interwoven. In this connection we have to do with those reciprocities between the atoms of society which only psychological microscopy can make out, those reciprocities which carry the whole tenacity and elasticity, the whole color (*Buntheit*) and sameness (*Einheitlichkeit*) of this so obvious and so mysterious life. The desideratum is to apply the principle of the endlessly numerous and endlessly

minute reactions to the coexisting (*das Nebeneinander*) in society, just as it has proved itself operative in the sciences of the consequent (*das Nacheinander*)—geology, the theory of biological evolution, history. The immeasurably short steps construct the correlation of the historical unity; the equally unimpressive reciprocities between person and person the societary correlation. That which incessantly occurs in the way of physical and psychical contacts, of reciprocal stimulation of joy and sorrow, of converse and silence, of shared and antagonized interest—all that is the real constructor of the wonderful indissolubility of society, the fluctuating of its life, with which its elements incessantly gain, lose, and shift their equilibrium. Perhaps with this sort of knowledge as a starting-point a gain will be made for social science comparable with that for the science of organic life from the beginning of microscopy. While investigation before that time was confined to the gross, decisively separated organs whose diversities of form and function presented themselves at once, now for the first time the life-process appeared in its connection with its minutest bearers, the cells, and in its identity with the innumerable and incessant reciprocities between the same. How they adhere to one another or destroy one another, how they assimilate or chemically modify one another—this at last gradually permits insight into how the body constructs, maintains, or changes its form. The major organs, in which these fundamental life-bearers and their reciprocations have assembled in macrocosmically perceptible special tissues and performances, would never have made the interdependence of life intelligible, if those countless procedures which play between the minutest elements, which are, as it were, first grasped together by the macrocosmic factors, had not unmasked themselves as the real, the fundamental life. Entirely aside from any sociological or metaphysical analogy between the realities of society and of organisms, the point here is the analogy between methodological conceptions and their development. We are concerned with the discovery of attenuated threads, of minimum relationships between people, from the continuous repetition of which all those great objectified structures which afford a real history have been

built up and maintained. These quite primary processes, which build society out of the immediate individual material, are accordingly, along with the higher and more complex processes and structures, to be subjected to formal scrutiny. The particular reactions which present themselves in these masses, to which theoretical vision is not quite yet accustomed, are to be tested as society-building forms, as parts of socialization in general. Indeed, these apparently insignificant types of relationship may profitably be subjected to investigation which shall be the more thorough in the degree in which sociology has thus far neglected these phenomena.

With this turn of the discussion the researches here planned appear to be nothing but chapters of psychology, or at most of social psychology. Now there is, to be sure, no doubt that all societal occurrences and instincts have their seat in souls, that socialization is a psychical phenomenon, and that for its fundamental fact—viz., a multiplicity of elements becoming a unity—there is not even an analogy in the world of matter; since in the latter everything remains confined in the invincible apartness of space. Whatever might be the sort of *external* occurrence to which we might apply the designation societal (*gesellschaftlich*), it would be a Punch and Judy show, not more intelligible and not more significant than the merging of clouds or the entangling of branches of trees, if we did not recognize quite independent psychic motivation, feelings, thoughts, needs, not merely as bearers of those externalities, but as their essence and that which really alone interests us. The causal understanding of any social occurrence whatsoever would therefore be in fact attained if psychological data and their development according to “psychological laws”—problematical as the idea of these is to us—permitted us completely to deduce these events. Moreover there is no doubt that whatever of historico-social existence is within our means of comprehension, is nothing else than psychical concatenations which we reconstruct with either instinctive or methodical psychology, and bring to subjective plausibility, to a feeling of the psychical necessity of the developments in question. To that extent every history, every depicting of a social condition,

is an exercise of psychological knowing. But it is a matter of extreme methodological necessity, and directly decisive for the principles of the psychical sciences in general, that the scientific treatment of psychical facts still by no means needs to be psychology. Even where we uninterruptedly employ psychological rules and perceptions, where the explanation of each separate fact is possible only in the psychological way, as is the case in sociology, the sense and intention of this procedure by no means needs to lead to psychology, i. e., not to the law of the psychic process, which process alone, to be sure, can carry a definite content; but the procedure leads only to this content and its configuration. There is here, however, only a difference of degree between the sciences of mind and the sciences of external nature. In the last analysis the latter, as facts of the mental life, are reflected only within the soul. The discovery of every astronomical or chemical truth, equally with reflection upon the same, is a consciousness-event which a complete psychology could deduce without reservations, purely from psychical conditions and developments. Yet in so far as they choose for their subject-matter, not the psychic processes, but their contents and their interdependences, those sciences of external nature come into being somewhat as we deduce a painting, according to its aesthetic meaning and its relation to art history, not from the physical oscillations, which produce the colors, and which we must admit create and maintain the whole real existence of the painting. There is always *one* reality which we cannot scientifically comprehend in its immediateness and totality; but we must take it up from a series of detached stand-points, and consequently shape it as a multiplicity of mutually independent scientific subject-matters. Now this is demanded also in the case of those psychic occurrences the contents of which do not form an independent spatial world, and do not visualize their psychic reality. The forms and laws of a language, for instance, which is certainly constructed out of energies of the soul, for purposes of the soul, are nevertheless treated by a linguistic science which disregards the only given realization of its object, and it presents, analyzes, or construes that object (i. e., the forms and laws themselves) purely according to its substan-

tial content and according to formations which exist only in and upon this content. The like is the case with the facts of socialization. That people influence one another, that the one does or suffers something, manifests a being or a becoming, because others are there and express themselves, act, or feel—all that is of course psychical phenomena, and the historical occurrence of each several case of it is to be understood only through psychological repetition, through the plausibility of psychological series, through the interpretation of the externally observable by means of psychological categories. But a peculiar scientific purpose may leave this psychic occurrence as such quite out of sight, and it may give its attention to the contents of the same as they set themselves in order under the concept of socialization. Suppose, for example, it is made out that the relation of a stronger to a weaker person, which has the form of *primus inter pares*, tends to become a possession of absolute power and gradually to eliminate the elements of equality. Although in historical reality this is a psychical occurrence, from the sociological viewpoint we are now interested only in the questions, How do the various stadia of the super- and sub-ordination in this case follow one another? To what degree is a super-ordination in a given relationship compatible with equality in other particulars? Beginning with what degree of superiority does the super-ordination wholly destroy the equality? Does the question of combination, the possibility of co-operation, press more urgently in the earlier or the later stages of such development? Or, it is discovered that enmities are most bitter when they arise on the basis of a previous or still somehow appreciable community and coherence, as feuds between blood relatives have been called the hottest hatreds. As an occurrence, this can be made intelligible or even described only psychologically; but considered as a sociological formation, the course of events in the consciousness of each of two individuals is not of interest in itself, but rather the synopsis of the two under the category of union and disunion—how far the relation between two individuals or parties may include hostility and attachment, and still give to the whole relation the shading of the latter, and when will it take on the coloring of the former; what sorts of

attachment, as recollection or as ineffaceable instinct, furnish the means for more cruel, deeper wounding injury than is possible in the case of alienation from the beginning; in brief, how is that observation to be represented as realization of forms of relationship between people; what peculiar combination of the social categories does it present? That is the present point, although the singular or typical description of the occurrence itself must always be solely psychological. Taking up an earlier suggestion, we may, by disregarding all differences, compare this with geometrical deduction which takes place in connection with a figure drawn on a blackboard. All that is here given and visible is certain physically produced chalk-marks; what we have in mind however, with our geometrical interest, is not these marks, but their significance for geometry; and that physical figure, as a deposit of chalk particles, is completely alien to that significance—while on the other hand, the figure as this physical structure may be brought under scientific categories, and for instance its physiological antecedents, or its chemical composition, or its optical impression may become the objects of special investigation. In like manner the data of sociology are psychical occurrences whose immediate actuality presents itself first to the psychological categories. The latter, however, although indispensable for delineation of the facts, remains outside the purpose of sociological investigation. This latter purpose is concerned rather with the phenomena of socialization, which, to be sure, are carried by the psychical occurrences, and are often to be described only by means of them—somewhat as a drama contains, from beginning to end, only psychical occurrences, can be understood only psychologically, and yet its purpose is not in psychological cognitions, but in the syntheses which constitute the contents of the psychic occurrences, under the viewpoints of tragedy, of artistic form, or of life symbols.

Although the theory of socialization as such, abstracted from all social sciences which are determined by a special content of societal life, appears to be the only science which has a right to the name *science of society* (*Gesellschaftswissenschaft*), the important matter is naturally not this nomenclature, but the dis-

covery of that new complex of social problems. The quarrel about what sociology really means, so long as it turns upon the assignment of this title to already existing and already treated groups of problems, seems to me unimportant. If, meanwhile, the title sociology is selected for this collection of tasks, with the claim that this collection completely and alone covers the idea of sociology, the claim must answer to another group of problems which undeniably seek to gain knowledge in addition to that of social sciences determined by their content—that is, knowledge of society as such and as a whole.

Like every other exact science which aims at immediate comprehension of given experience, social science is also hemmed in by two philosophical regions. The one embraces the limitations, elementary concepts, presuppositions of the particular investigation which in the special investigation itself can find no complete expression, since they rather are at the basis of the investigation. In the other region this particular investigation is carried to completions and correlations, and is put in relationship with questions and concepts which have no place within experience and immediately objective knowledge. The former is the epistemology, the latter the metaphysics of the particular territories in question. This latter metaphysics signifies virtually two problems which nevertheless are usually undifferentiated in the actual processes of thought. On the one hand dissatisfaction with the fragmentary character of the particular details of knowledge, with the early exhaustion of the actually demonstrable data, and of the series of provable things, leads to attempts at completing these by means of speculation. These very same means, then, serve the parallel need of reinforcing the disconnectedness and the reciprocal incoherence of those particles by organizing them into the unity of a complete view. By the side of this metaphysical function, which has to do with the degree of knowledge, there is another, dealing with another dimension of existence, in which the metaphysical significance of its contents lies. We express this as the sense or the purpose, as the absolute substance under the relative phenomena, also as the value or the religious significance. In the case of society this spiritual

attitude yields such questions as these: Is society the purpose of human existence, or the means for the individual? Is society, after all, for the individual, not a means, but the reverse, an obstruction? Is the value of society to be found in its functional life, or in the production of an objective mind, or in the ethical qualities which it calls into being in the individual? In the typical stadia of the evolution of societies is a cosmic analogy revealed—so that the social interrelations of human beings might be co-ordinated in a universal form or rhythm which does not appear in the phenomena, but which is fundamental to all the phenomena, and which is also the channel of the root forces of the material facts? Can there be in fact a metaphysico-religious significance of totalities, or is such significance reserved for individual souls?

All these and countless similar questions seem to me not to possess that categorical independence, that unique relationship between object and method which could legitimate them as the basis of sociology, as a new science which would be co-ordinate with existing sciences. The reason is that all such questions are merely *philosophical* questions, and that they have taken society as their object signifies only the extension of an already given type of understanding to a further territory. Whether philosophy is recognized as a science or not, the philosophy of society has no legal right to withdraw itself from the advantages or the disadvantages of its relationship to philosophy in general by constituting itself a special science of sociology.

The case is not different with the type of philosophical problems which do not, like the former, have society as their presupposition, but rather inquire after the presuppositions of society—that is, not in the historical sense, which would require a description of how a given particular society, or the physical and anthropological traits, actually came into existence on the basis of their society. Nor is the question in the case here under consideration as to the specific impulses which move the persons concerned, upon meeting other persons, to the reactions which sociology describes. The question is rather this: Supposing such persons are given—what are the presuppositions of their con-

sciousness of being a societary existence? In such elements in and of themselves society is not yet given. In the forms of reaction between them, society is already actual. What, then, are the subjective conditions, in principle, on the basis of which the individuals fitted out with such impulses bring society into existence in general, what is the apriori which makes possible and forms the empirical structure of the individual in so far as it is social? How are not merely the empirically emerging, separate formations possible, which stand under the universal concept society, but society in general as an objective form of subjective souls?²¹

It is a somewhat vain question whether the researches into the epistemology of society which are to be exemplified by these outlines belong in social philosophy or are properly parts of sociology. Supposing they are a border territory between the two methods, the security of the sociological problem as above described, and its boundaries with respect to philosophical problems, suffer therefrom as little as the definiteness of the ideas of day and night suffers from the fact that there is twilight, or the conception of man and brute from the possibility that perhaps a missing link may be found which may combine the characteristics of the two in a way which we have no means of analyzing. Since the sociological question deals with the abstraction of that which alone, in the complex experience that we call social life, is actually society, i. e., *socialization*; since the sociological question eliminates from the purity of this concept everything which is realized historically, to be sure, only within society, which however does not constitute society as such, as a unique and autonomous form of existence—a completely unequivocal nucleus of tasks is thereby constituted. It may be that the periphery of this range of problems temporarily or permanently comes in contact with

²¹ At this point Simmel introduces an excursus of 19 pages under the title *Wie ist Gesellschaft möglich?* Partly as a way of emphasizing the contention that it is a waste of energy to attempt to rehabilitate the term society as an instrument of precision, we shall publish in the January number of this *Journal* a translation of this passage. The reminder of the present translation contains the passage with which Simmel closes the chapter after the excursus, p. 45.

other circles, and that the boundary lines are vague. The center remains, however, fixed in its place.

I pass, then, to the task of proving the fertility of this central concept and problem in the case of specific investigations. I am far from making the claim of approximating the number of those forms of reciprocity which constitute society. My analysis merely shows the way which may lead to the scientific discrimination of the whole scope of society from the totality of life. At all events I desire to show this way by myself taking the first steps in it.²²

²²Fore studies for the contents of Simmel's volume have already appeared in this *Journal* as follows: Chap. ii ("Die quantitative Bestimmtheit der Gruppe"), under the title, "The Number of Members as Determining the Sociological Form of the Group," Vol. VIII, pp. 1 and 158; chap. iii ("Ueber- und Unterordnung"), under the title, "Superiority and Subordination as Subject-Matter of Sociology," Vol. II, pp. 167 and 392; chap. iv ("Der Streit"), under the title, "The Sociology of Conflict," Vol. IX, pp. 490, 567, 798; chap. v ("Das Geheimnis und die geheime Gesellschaft"), under the title "The Sociology of Secrecy and Secret Societies," Vol. XI, p. 441; chap. viii ("Die Selbsterhaltung der Gruppe"), under the title, "The Persistence of Social Groups," Vol. III, pp. 662 and 829, and Vol. IV, p. 35.