SUPERIORITY AND SUBORDINATION AS SUBJECT-MATTER OF SOCIOLOGY. II.

In the case of subordination to a numerous superior, of which I have so far spoken, the separate elements of this superior order are coördinated with each other — or at least they work, in the relation that comes here into view, as though they were coördinated. New appearances occur so soon as the numerous superior ceases to act as a unity of similar elements. In this event the superiors may be either opposed to each other or they may compose a series in which the superior is in his turn subordinate to a higher. I will now consider the former case, which may have very different consequences for the subordinates.

When it occurs that one is totally subject to a number of mutually opposed persons or groups, that is, in such manner that the subject brings no spontaneity into the relation, but rather is completely dependent upon each of the superiors, he will suffer severely under their opposition. In the first place, each of the superiors will demand his entire strength and service, and on the other hand will hold him as responsible for everything which he does under the compulsion of the others as though it were of his own motion. This is the typical situation of him who "serves two masters." It is to be seen in the case of children whose parents are inharmonious, and likewise in that of a petty state which is equally dependent on two powerful neighbors, and consequently in the event of conflict between the superiors the inferior will be held responsible by the one for that to which it was forced by its inferiority to the other. If this conflict of the individuals or groups is completely subjectified in the inferior, if the contestants operate as ideal moral forces which set up their demands within the inferior person, the case is "a conflict of duties." Here, as in those external cases

which still compose the type for the latter, a smooth solution of the difficulty is in most cases out of the question. On the contrary the subordinate will often enough be crushed between the colliding interests of his superiors.

This result, as was said, presupposes that the subordinate himself exercises no spontaneity in the relation, but is entirely dependent. A wholly contrasted result appears so soon as the subordinate himself has any power to exert in the relation, with any degree of freedom in its application. Then occurs the case of such extreme sociological significance—*duobus litigantibus tertius gaudet.* In departments of activity concerned with the most widely different material interests, in the most manifold often concealed combinations, the significance of the *tertius gaudens* comes into effect. It is one of the typical forms of the attitude of human beings toward each other. It becomes actual equally in connection with the most wildly contrasted provinces of interests. I call attention merely to the power of small states and small parties, derived from the fact that larger powers, each of which is unquestionably in itself superior to the third, come into conflict with each other. If the powers of these opponents are equal, an element which in itself is weak may, by attaching itself to the one or the other, determine the contest in the interest of the power which it favors. Through the competition of the rivals for its aid this minor element acquires an importance which it would never have gained if the attitude of the two greater powers toward each other had been peaceable. History presents countless quite transparent cases of this constellation.

A somewhat more complicated form presents itself in the fact that until recently the majority of English laborers did not feel the need of organizing a distinct labor party. The competition of the great existing parties for their support, in consequence of which they so often gave the victory to the one or the other, gives them larger political influence than a separate party organization could command. The latter alternative would involve the adoption of an independent party programme. It would consequently take from them the advantage of being able

at each moment, without any prejudice, to play the rôle of *tertius gaudens* toward the parties, both of which in themselves are far superior in strength to the intermediate element.

When subordination means not merely inferiority in power, but direct obligation to obey, this position between opposed superiors, so soon at least as the slightest independence in relation to the latter exists, may lead to entire emancipation from inferiority. An essential difference between the mediæval "unfree" men and the vassals consisted in the fact that the former had and could have only one master, while the latter could accept land from different lords and could take the oath of fealty to each. By reason of this possibility of placing themselves in the feudal relation to several persons the vassals won strong security and independence against the individual lords. The inferiority of the position of vassalage was thereby to a considerable degree equalized.

Finally, this consequence may result not alone from the opposition of contemporary superior powers, but also from that of unlike powers that supersede each other. The growth of the democratic consciousness in France has been traced in part to the fact that since the fall of Napoleon I. changing administrations have followed each other rapidly, each inefficient, insecure, courting the favor of the masses, whereby in consequence the consciousness of his social importance was effectively impressed upon each citizen. Although he was subordinate to each of these governments in itself, nevertheless he had a sense of personal strength, because he was the permanent element in all the change and contrast of the governments. The progress is formally the same—*i. e.*, the growing independence (*Verselbständigung*) of the subordinate through the position as *tertius gaudens*—the difference being that the superiors are not contemporary but successive.

Equally different consequences for the inferior result in the second case, viz., when the superiors themselves stand in the relation of superiority and inferiority. In this case the decisive consideration is whether the subordinate possesses an immediate

relation to the highest in rank of his superiors, or whether the intermediate authority, which while superior to the subordinate is also inferior to the highest in rank, separates the subordinate in question from the supreme authority, and thus *de facto* alone represents the superior elements over against that particular subordinate. Feudalism furnished cases of the first sort, since he who was subject to a superior at the same time remained subject to the highest ruling house. A very distinct picture of this is furnished by English feudalism at the time of William the Conqueror. Stubbs describes it as follows:

> All men continued to be primarily the king's men, and the public peace to be his peace. Their lords might demand their service to fulfill their own obligations, but the king could call them to the fyrd, summon them to his courts, and tax them without the intervention of their lords; and to the king they could look for protection against all foes.

Thus the lot of an inferior with reference to a superior is a favorable one, if this superior in turn is inferior to a higher authority to whom the lowest in rank has recourse. This is also the peculiar natural consequence of the sociological configuration here under discussion. Since as a rule some sort of rivalry and conflict of authority arises between contiguous elements in the scale of superiority, the intermediate is often in conflict with the higher as well as with the lower in rank. Common opposition is however a strong bond of union — one of the most typical of formal rules, which applies in all existing departments of social life. Through this relation a coalition is established between the highest element of this series and the lowest, and this connection affords to the latter a strong security against his immediate superior. Thus we see, times without number, that the struggles of the lower classes against the aristocracy have had the assistance of the monarch.

If however this direct connection is interrupted, if the intermediate stratum has inserted itself so extensively and powerfully between the higher and the lower strata that all initiative of the highest in favor of the lowest can be mediated only through the middle stratum, there result conversely very unfavorable con-

sequences for the inferior. Thus in case the organization consists of three elements, a highest central power, an extended lowest stratum, and a middle stratum, which exercises toward the lowest stratum a portion of the governmental functions, either from original and free right, or by virtue of transference from the supreme power—then is the working of this middle stratum not so much a connection as a separation of the two others. So long as subordination defined by relations to landed estates (*Gutsunterthänigkeit*) continued, the noble was a bearer of the administrative organization of the state. He exercised toward his subordinates judicial, economic and fiscal functions without which the state of that period could not have existed, and he certainly in this wise bound the subordinate masses to this general interest and the supreme power. Since, however, the noble has also private interests, in pursuance of which he wants to use the peasant for his own purposes, it comes about that he employs to this end his position as a part of the administrative organization between government and peasants, and he annuls in fact for a long time those measures and laws through which the government sought to be of immediate assistance to the peasantry—something which for a long time is possible only through the mediation of the nobility.

This combination, the erection of different superiors the one above the other, exhibits a very important sociological formation: elements which are at once superior and inferior. This is the characteristic form of the hierarchy, upon which every highly elaborated organization of a group is based. Wherever the realization of an objective purpose is concerned, the personal coöperation of the elements which are to produce the result will take place for the most part in the form of a stratified numerously articulated superiority and inferiority. Accordingly the Roman slave family was precisely and numerously graded, from the *villicus* and *procurator* who managed independently whole branches of production in the great slave industries, down through all possible classifications to the foremen of groups of ten laborers. I would refer to the constitution of every factory, of every enterprise on

a large scale, and especially of every army. That through the simultaneous superiority and inferiority of each element in the hierarchy, its position, both with reference to the higher and the lower elements, is accurately defined, must lead the individual to a high degree of stability in his feeling about life (*Lebensgefühl*), in so far as this is at all socially determinable. It must thereby assure to the whole organization a much closer coherence than if the individual regards himself as either exclusively superior or exclusively inferior.

In case very numerous and energetic superiorities and inferiorities are present in a group, whether in the form of the hierarchic structure or in parallel collocation, the group as a whole will derive its character essentially from subordination, as appears with special distinctness in the case of bureaucratically ruled states, like Russia for example. This results from the fact that the strata extend themselves downward in rapid progression, so that the quantitatively preponderant is always the subordinate, and consequently the whole produces the impression of universal subordination. If we take a purely æsthetic view of the case we may, to be sure, through quite special combinations, get the impression of universal superiority in a group. The Spaniards' pride and contempt for labor developed from the fact that for a long time they had the subjugated Moors for their laborers. After they had subsequently either annihilated or expelled these and the Jews, there still remained to them indeed the appearance of superiors, because there was no longer any inferior who could constitute the necessary correlate. In general, however, the antithesis of universal subordination appears to be not so much universal superiority as universal freedom. If we look closer it appears almost always that liberation from inferiority means at the same time the gain of a superiority, either over against the hitherto superior, or to a stratum henceforth destined to more definite inferiority.

The consequence of the French Revolution for the third estate — apparently its mere liberation from the privileges of the favored classes—signified both things. In the first place the third

estate, by means of its economic resources, made the formerly superior estates dependent upon it. In the second place, however, the third estate and its whole emancipation was of meaning and consequence only because of the fact that a fourth estate existed or built itself up in the course of like progress. The third estate could exploit the fourth and raise itself above it. Consequently we can by no means draw the simple analogy that the fourth estate wants to do today precisely what the third did one hundred years ago, for the freedom from subordination which the latter achieved was, as remarked, closely united with the gain of superiority over the fourth estate. Likewise is it to be observed that the "freedom of the church" is apt to be by no means merely a liberation from superior secular powers, but it usually means at the same time the acquisition of control over the same. Thus, for example, the "ecclesiastical freedom of teaching" (*Lehrfreiheit der Kirche*) means that the state contains citizens who stand under the suggestion of the church, who are impressed by it, and thereby the state has often enough passed under the control of the church.[1]

Moreover this sociological type, viz., that liberation from inferiority at once enlarges itself by effort after or gain of superiority — exhibits itself in somewhat more complicated manifestations. In case the whole lowest strata sought to gain an absolute elevation of their position, a lessening of the quantum of their inferiority, the consequence has often been that a certain portion of the group uniformly seeking elevation reaches the higher plane, which, however, only means that these become a part of the previously superior strata, while the rest remain inferior. This is especially the case, and very naturally, wherever within the aspiring strata there is already a division of superiors and inferiors. In this case, after the end of the rebellion against the stratum which is superior to them all, the difference between the rebels, which during the commotion fell into the background, will at once appear again, and will bring it to pass that the formerly more eminent now assimilate themselves to that higher stratum, while

[1] *Cf.* my *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, II, p. 254.

their former associates in effort become so much the more degraded. A part of the English labor revolution of 1830 conforms to this type. In order to win for themselves the right of voting for members of parliament the laborers combined with the reform party and the middle classes. The consequence was the passage of a law which gave the suffrage to all classes *except the laborers.* Precisely the same thing occurred in the Bohemian revolution of 1848. Here the peasants abolished the last remnants of serfdom in the constitution. This was no sooner done than the differences in the situation of the peasants made themselves effective. Before and during the revolutionary agitation these differences were kept from view by the fact of common subjection. The lower classes of the rural population demanded now a division of the common lands. This at once aroused in the more prosperous peasants all their conservative instincts, and they set themselves against the demands of the rural proletariat in conjunction with whom they had first triumphed over the lords, precisely as the lords had just resisted the peasants' demands. From consideration of this type many Austrian politicians who are friends of the workingman have recently raised objections to the workingmen's committees (*Arbeiterausschüsse*), by means of which it is hoped that the bondage and oppression of the laboring classes may be modified. It is feared that these committees may become an aristocracy of labor, which on account of its position of influence nearer to the employer may the easier be drawn over to his interest, and thus the rest of the laborers by this apparent progress may be the more abandoned.

Both socialism and anarchism will allege that liberation from inferiority will no longer thus enlarge itself by immediate endeavor after superiority, so soon as social organization in general is no longer effected in the form of superiority and inferiority, and these gradations are no more to be encountered at any point. Both theories contradict the above emphasized significance of the hierarchy for associated production, and they presuppose the belief that economy is possible in the life and activity of the group along with complete coördination of its

members. For so long in the future as prevision can reach, however, we may contest the possibility of a social constitution without superiority and inferiority, just as we may assert that the natural differences between human beings, which no common education can remove, will press for expression in external gradations of ranks, in differences of superordination and subordination. A tendency of culture is nevertheless thinkable which, in spite of the persistence of superordination and subordination, approximates in result to that which socialism and anarchism want to reach by doing away with social ranks. The way to this would be through such psychical development that the individual's consciousness of life (*Lebensgefühl*) would become less dependent upon external activity and the position assigned to the individual within the same. It is quite conceivable that in the progress of civilization productive activity may become more and more technique, and may at last lose practically all its consequences for that which is essential and personal in man. As a matter of fact we find the approach to this separation as the sociological type of numerous phases of development. While personality and performance (*Leistung*) were in the beginning closely mingled, the division of labor and the production of commodities for the market, *i. e.*, for wholly unknown and indifferent consumers, brings it about that personality tends to withdraw from industrial performance and to find recourse in itself. This tendency is promoted by advances in technique, in consequence of which productive activity is constantly acquiring a more mechanical and objective character. Evolution in many departments of industry, particularly in connection with the transition from hand labor to machine labor, has followed this scheme. It is accordingly thinkable that this isolation of labor, in contradistinction from the consciousness of life and personality (*Lebens- und Persönlichkeitsgefühl*), might lead to making superordination and subordination merely a technicality in the organization of society By means of this differentiation, this converting of superiority and inferiority into a mere technicality, detached from every-

thing really essential to the person, the end would be gained which socialism and anarchism seek by repudiating this form of coöperation. This follows because the end in question cannot be other than a psychical one, viz., the removal of the feelings of sorrow, humiliation, oppression, which are today connected with subordination under others.

Evolution might approach this end by another course, which discloses to us a broader and more important type of superordination and subordination as sociological form. Proudhon, as is well known, would abolish all superiority and inferiority by dissolving all those ruling structures which have differentiated themselves out of the reciprocal operation of individuals as bearers of the social forces. He would then base all order and all coherence upon immediate reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) between free, coördinate individuals. But such coördination is perhaps to be reached along with continuation of superordination and subordination, *provided only that these relations are interchangeable*. This was the case with reference to certain persons or circles in group formations discussed above, in which each was at the same time superior and inferior. We may go beyond this and think of an ideal constitution, in which in one respect or at one time A is superior to B; in another respect or at another time, however, B is superior to A. In such case the value of superordination and subordination as elements of organization would be preserved, while their oppressiveness, one-sidedness and injustice would disappear. In point of fact there are very many phenomena of life in society in which this form-type is realized, although it may be in partial, mangled and obscured fashion. An example on a narrow scale is a productive association of laborers, in an enterprise for which they choose a manager and superintendent. While in the processes of the business the associated laborers are subordinate to the manager, yet in respect to the general conduct and outcome of the enterprise they are his superiors. All groups in which the leader changes, either through frequent choice or according to regular term, down to the case of chairman of a social union, seek in this way

to gain the technical advantage of superiority and subordination while avoiding its personal disadvantages. Simultaneous superordination and subordination is one of the most decisive forms of reciprocity, and, if properly disposed throughout the various departments of activity, may, by virtue of this very intimate reciprocity which it signifies, constitute a most powerful bond between individuals. The matrimonial relation owes its external and internal stability (*Festigkeit*), at least in part, to the fact that it encompasses a great number of departments of interest, with reference to many of which the one party is superior, while with respect to many others the other party is foremost. There arises from this fact a growing together (*Ineinanderwachsen*), a oneness, and at the same time such essential vitality of the relation as is hardly to be attained in the case of other sociological forms. What we call "equality of right" between husband and wife in marriage will doubtless turn out to be such an alternating superordination and subordination. At least this would be a much more organic and centripetal relation than would result from a mechanical equality in the immediate sense of the word.

This form of relationship constituted also one of the firmest bonds for the army of Cromwell. The same soldier who in military relations rendered blind obedience to his superior in rank frequently made himself in the conventicle a preacher of morals to this same superior. A corporal might conduct the devotions in which his captain participated on the same level with the privates. The army which followed its leader without reserve, when once a political purpose had been accepted, nevertheless previously came to political determinations of its own, to which the leaders had to subordinate themselves. Through this interchangeableness of superiority and inferiority the Puritan army, so long as it held together, derived extraordinary stability.

It must be observed further that this advantageous consequence of the form of association under discussion depends upon provision that the sphere within which the one social element is superior is very accurately and unequivocally delimited from those spheres in which the other is superior. Whenever this is

not the case conflicts of authority will incessantly arise, and the consequence will be not strengthening but weakening of the relationship. Especially in the event that one who is generally subordinate by some peculiar turn of affairs reaches a superiority which remains within the province of his previous inferiority, it follows that partly through the character of rebellion which the condition will then usually bear, partly through the inadequate qualification of the always subordinate for superiority in the same sphere, the stability of the group will suffer. Accordingly at the time of the supremacy of Spain, the Spanish army, for example in the Netherlands, broke out in periodical rebellions. Although it was held together in the beginning by terrific discipline, yet every now and then an irrepressible democratic energy manifested itself. At certain almost calculable intervals the soldiers rose against the officers, removed them, put them under strict control, and chose other officers of their own, who, however, were subject to the supervision of the soldiers, and were allowed to do nothing which was not approved by all their subordinates. The harmfulness of such intermixture of superiority and inferiority in one and the same sphere needs no discussion.

A case of quite similar sociological form, with entirely different content, was presented by the serious embarrassments which arose at the beginning of this century in the American Episcopal Church. The ecclesiastical bodies were often seized with a feverish passion for exercising control over the clergy, while the latter were installed for the very purpose of exerting moral and ecclesiastical control over the membership. Substantially the same thing occurs in hierarchies of civil officials, where the one in authority is dependent in technicalities upon his subordinates. The superior official often lacks knowledge of the technical details or of the actual condition of affairs. The subordinate official passes his life as a rule within the same round of duties, and thereby acquires a detailed knowledge of his limited sphere which escapes him who rises rapidly through the different grades, while the decisions of the latter cannot be carried into

execution without this detailed knowledge. In Russia this is a prevailing condition, and it is especially encouraged by the method of filling offices which is followed there. Promotion occurs according to grade in the official hierarchy, but not necessarily within the same branch of the service. When, on the contrary, one has reached a certain official class, at his own wish or that of his superior he may be transferred with the same rank to an entirely different branch of the service. It is consequently a not infrequent occurrence that a graduated student, after six months of military service at the front, becomes an officer, without further preparation; while an officer, on the other hand, by transfer into the civil grade corresponding with his military rank, may secure a more promising position in the civil service. How, without training for their new duties, they shall adapt themselves to the changed relations, is their own affair. With inevitable frequency, therefore, the higher official lacks technical knowledge appropriate to his position, and this makes him quite as inevitably dependent upon a subordinate and his knowledge of affairs. This reciprocity of superiority and inferiority often causes the one who is actually conducting the business to seem the subordinate, while he who only executes what the other directs seems the superior. The consequences are no less unfavorable to compactness of organization than appropriately apportioned alternation of superiority and inferiority would be productive of the same.

I come now to the discussion of a further characteristic of relations of superiority and inferiority, viz., that which is imparted to the group by subsidiary relations between the elements so connected. Whether the persons so connected are near to each other or far apart, whether they manifest likenesses or unlikenesses, imparts to the superiority and inferiority existing between them definite consequences and shadings. Thus among the essential distinguishing signs of sociological formations is whether a group preferably subordinates itself to a stranger or to one of its own members. Subordination to one who has emerged from the same circle, and is essentially no more than the equal of

those subordinated to him, is sometimes regarded as more tolerable, more useful, more desirable, and again as more oppressive, more obstructive, and more unworthy. In a precisely corresponding way is subordination to a stranger, or a person outside the group, contradictorily valued. In Germany in the Middle Ages the feudal lords at first had the right to name at will judges and leaders from abroad for the people attached to their estate. At length, however, the latter often won the concession that the official should be taken from within their own circle. At the same time Italian cities, on the contrary, followed the principle of procuring their judges from distant cities. This divergence, viz., estimate of control by a stranger, now as lighter, now as severer, than control by one who is nearer, has certain utilitarian justifications. The stranger is less partisan, the member of the group is more intelligent about its conditions. But these consciously rational grounds not only fail entirely in many cases, but, since they are in principle of equal value, the *decision between them* requires a higher ground, which is always instinctive. This is due to the fact that this question is a side issue of the great psychical dualism—the equality of both attraction and repulsion by like and by unlike. According as the one tendency or the other is psychically predominant, will the group prefer to subordinate itself to one of its own or to a stranger. As a matter of fact it is wholly an affair of feeling, which cannot be rationalized, whether one seems to himself more humiliated by subordination to one who is near or to one farther removed. In general we may say that the lower a group stands as a whole, the more each individual member is accustomed to subordination, the less willingly will they suffer themselves to be controlled by one of their own; the higher the group stands, the more likely it will be to subordinate itself to one of its peers alone. This feeling at its highest power has been exhibited by the House of Lords, which will not merely be recognized by every peer as his only judge, but in 1330 expressly repelled the insinuation that they wished to sit in judgment upon others than their *peers*. So decided is thus the tendency

to permit themselves to be judged only by their peers that it becomes retroactive—they are afraid of lowering themselves to the level of others by permitting themselves to become the judges of the latter. This is drawing the logically fallacious, but for the psychological basis of social formation very significant conclusion, that since only our equals are to be judged by us, therefore everyone upon whom we pass a judicial verdict is to a certain degree our equal.

Just as in this case a relation of such definite inferiority as that of an accused to his judge may still be regarded as placing the two upon a certain level of equality, so on the contrary may equality be sometimes regarded as subordination. Sir Henry Maine once said that the principle of nationality, as it is often presented, appears to assert that men of one race suffer an invasion of their rights, if they are obliged to have political arrangements in common with men of another race. Thus if two different social characters are in consideration, A and B, A appears to be subordinated to B, so soon as a constitution is thought of for the former like that belonging to the latter; although this constitution may contain nothing which connotes such lower standing or subordination. Thus, in the case of the Lords just cited, subordination seemed coördination; here coördination seems to be subordination.

Finally there belongs under this rubric the very important observation that subordination under a somewhat remotely stationed personage seems to be most serviceable when the group itself consists of heterogeneous and dissimilar elements. In this case the members of a group that is subordinated to a superior personage are related to each other precisely as the particular representations, which go to make up a general conception, are related to each other. That is to say, this conception must be the higher and the more abstract, in other words it must stand at the greater distance from each particular representation, the more unlike each other these latter are, which the general conception must comprehend. The most familiar and typical case of this sort, which recurs with formal similarity in a thousand

spheres, is that of rival parties that come together for the purpose of choosing an arbiter, and very properly fix their choice upon one who is standing completely apart from both. The more the latter is the case the more willingly will both submit to his decision. It is to be kept in mind as decisive in this case that the contending parties must be coördinate, if the type is to appear in its purity. If there already rules between them any sort of superiority and inferiority, this will all too easily create a special connection of the judge with the one party, and to that extent non-partisanship will be destroyed. Even when the referee is quite removed from either contestant's circle of specific interests, he will often nevertheless bring to his judgment a prejudice in favor of the superior, in many cases also in favor of the inferior. From the other point of view the nomination of an unpartisan arbiter is, for the reason just mentioned, a sign that the contestants concede to each other a certain coördination. Thus when in England at the present time, in the case of conflicts between laborers and employés, arbitrations frequently occur, an incident of which is mutual agreement to submit to a non-partisan — who must be neither laborer nor employer — it is evident that only recognized coördination between the contestants could induce the employers to give up participation of their own class in the arbitration, and to admit a wholly outside party.

Accordingly a further example, altogether different in material, may teach us that the common relation of many elements to a superior, whatever be the contained differences, the more certainly presupposes or produces coördination among their elements, the higher the superior power stands above them. To specify: — it is obviously very weighty for the socializing significance of the religion of wide circles that the Divinity is to be found at a certain distance from the believers. The immediate local proximity, so to speak, to the devotees, which is presumed in the case of the divine principles of all totemistic or fetichistic religions, and of the God of the ancient Jews as well, makes these religions entirely unfit to control wide areas. The

extreme loftiness of the Christian conception of God (which was directly demonstrated in the idea of the necessity of the propitiatory death of Christ) at last made equality before God possible. Distance from Him was so immeasurable that differences between men vanished before it. It was necessary that the divine principle should be withdrawn to this height in order that it should suffice to reconcile the endless differences of believers.

I come now to the last sociological problem which I will connect with the fact of superiority and inferiority. On the one hand superiority and inferiority constitute a form of the objective organization of society. On the other hand they are an expression of differences in the personal quality of men. What now is the relation of these two determinations to each other, and how is the form of socialization affected by the variations of this relation?

In the beginning of social development superordination of one person over others must have been the adequate expression and consequence of personal superiority. There is no visible reason why, in a social condition without firm organization which *a priori* assigns to the individual his station, anybody should subordinate himself to another, unless force, piety, mental superiority, suggestion, in short the relation of his personal qualities to those of the other, determined him to such submission. From this origin of superordination and subordination, which of course is at every moment operative within society, and continually founds new relations, there develop permanent organizations of superordination and subordination into which individuals are born, or in which they gain specific positions on the ground of quite other qualities than those which established in the first place the superordination and subordination in question. While at first there were simply human beings with their peculiarities, and their relations grew out of these, later the relations themselves were given as objective forms, "stations," empty spaces and boundaries as it were, thenceforth to be "filled out" by individuals. The more firmly

and technically the organization of the group is elaborated, the more objectively and formally will the schemes of superordination and subordination present themselves. Then, as a supplementary matter, the proper persons are selected for these relationships, or they are filled out by the mere accidents of birth and other chances. In this connection we are by no means to think merely of the hierarchy of civil positions. Financial economy creates within the spheres of its control a wholly similar formation of society. Possession or lack of a determined sum of money signifies a determined social station almost entirely independent of the personal qualities of the individual concerned. This is thrown out into bold relief by the fact that money is a possession not in any necessary connection with personality, but possible to everyone who may earn or inherit it. People traverse the positions corresponding with possession of determined sums of money, just as purely fortuitous substances find their way through rigidly fixed forms. To whatever extent socialism may condemn this blind accidental relation between the objective gradation of positions and the qualifications of persons, its proposals for organization end with the same sociological formation. This is evident when we consider that socialism demands an absolutely centralized, that is of necessity a firmly articulated and hierarchical constitution and administration. It, however, assumes *a priori* the equal fitness of all individuals to occupy any position in this hierarchy whatsoever. According to the ideal of consistent socialism, in the state of the future the same person who today performs the most menial work may tomorrow turn the scale upon the most weighty political questions. Herewith has the formal demand for superordination and subordination become completely master over the subjective qualities from which the demand has its source.

This analysis brings us to a sociological perception of the very highest significance: that superordination and subordination are a formal structural (*organisatorische*) necessity for the continuance of the group. In comparison with this necessity, what persons shall be the superiors or inferiors is a secondary question. As a

demand of social self-preservation this necessity confronts us in very primitive conditions. At the time when in Germany the earliest constitution of complete personal and property equality within the community had become obsolete, the landless man found himself without the active rights of a freeman. If he did not wish to remain without any connection with the community, it was necessary for him to attach himself to a lord, in order thus, as entitled to protection (*Schutzgenosse*), to participate indirectly in the public associations. The community had an interest in his doing this, for it could not tolerate an unattached man within its circuit; consequently Anglo-Saxon law expressly made it the duty of the landless man to attach himself to a lord. Likewise in mediæval England the interest of the community demanded that the stranger should place himself under a protecting lord. From such very simple points of departure the conviction grew that men must in general be governed—better by unfit persons than not at all—that in general only the group must assume the form of superordination and subordination, so that it is consequently only a desirable accident if, in the objectively necessary position, the subjectively suitable individual has his place. As explanations or justifications of this order, which is supposed to be immanent in the nature of social beings, all the theories appear which, since Aristotle, teach that there are φύσει δοῦλοι who in general could not bear another kind of life than that of subordination, and that the organization of society after the form of superordination and subordination is merely an expression of this fact. At the same time the converse possibility is often overlooked, viz., that the actual subordination, resting upon quite other grounds than personal qualifications, has led to an adaptation of individuals and classes to this condition, *i. e.*, to the now evidently actual quality and disposition for subordination.

Two lines of thought stand here over against each other, each of which may cite for itself a long series of facts from every department of social life, so that each represents a significant sociological formation.

In consideration of the actual unlikeness in the qualities of

human beings—to be removed only in a Utopia—the aristocracy of the best is surely the sort of constitution in which the external relationship between men is the most exact and efficient expression of their subjective relation. But an aristocracy of the best, such as Plato wanted, can never be fully realized, because there is no infallible means of recognizing the best. Even if it could be realized it would not exist permanently, since the possession of power unquestionably corrupts not always individuals but corporate bodies and classes. The aristocracy of the best lies therefore in close proximity to the aristocracy of the worst. Consequently the condition of universal equality seems to be the *lesser evil*, which may gradually attain to the dignity of an absolutely good condition. The peculiar difficulties then which the formal fact of superordination entails, produce the advantage of an external constitution which stands in direct antithesis with the subjective qualifications of the individuals.

And yet, the corresponding pessimistic temper may deny the necessity of this result, and may hold that which here appears the lesser evil to be the greater. This may be plausible from the point of view that, should rigid superordination and subordination disappear, there would go with it the compulsion, which human nature now at all events needs, to avoid falling into complete aimlessness and formlessness of conduct. Thus for many historical epochs one may cite the advantage of established hereditary despotism, which forces wide territories together in unity, in comparison with free federation of the same. There is the same presumption in favor of despotism that there is in favor of marriage as contrasted with "free love." Marriage often holds the parties together by force, when from passion, or anger or indifference they would separate if they could. But what blessing there is in this compulsion! How it helps over disturbances of the relation, to which it would be irreparable injury to yield. Only subordination could accomplish this—either to a person or to a law. It is as though there existed in our soul two strata or tendencies, differentiated from each other in principle; the one bearing the real meaning and purpose and substance of our

lives, while the other is made up of momentary impulses and isolated irritations. The latter would still oftener conquer the former if the inconsistencies and perversities in its variations were not broken up by objective regularities, through which the abiding undercurrent repeatedly recovers its power. Since now the objective and ideal constraint must, as a rule, be borne by superordinated persons, so in the most complicated relations, those of the family, of the class (*ständischen*), of politics, of the church, of social intercourse in the restricted sense (*geselligen*) —personal superordination seems to be the necessary form of coherence of the elements. Here also adaptation of the superordinated or subordinated position to the individual qualification is not a necessary element. It is only the universally human qualification which, in the sociological form of organized constraint, finds its adequate expression.

More than this, such correspondence of personal qualifications and social position in the series of superordinations and subordinations is *in general and on principle impossible*, no matter what sort of organization may be proposed for this purpose. With this perception we encounter the last and most radical complication which connects itself with the problem of the correspondence of these factors. It consists in the fact that there are always more persons qualified for superior positions than there are positions of that order. Of the millions subject to a prince there are surely a great number who would be equally good and perhaps better princes. Of the workmen in a factory there are many who would be equally good managers or at least foremen. Among the common soldiers of an army are many who possess full, though perhaps latent, qualifications to be officers. This unquestioned fact is not done away with by the contrasted fact that there are also many people in superior positions who do not possess sufficient qualifications for the same. In the first place such an occurrence is very conspicuous. Incapacity in a position from which others must be led is less easily concealed than other incapacities. It consequently seems to occur with special frequency, precisely *because* so many others

really fitted for the superior station occupy contiguous inferior positions. As a matter of fact the purely individual incompetency of the persons in controlling positions is relatively infrequent. A German proverb says, "When God gives an office he gives the brains for it."[1] The truth of the observation herein contained rests upon the fact that the intelligence requisite for occupancy of superior positions exists in many people, but it may exert and develop and reveal itself only when they assume the position. When we think of the ridiculous and uncontrollable accidents by which men in all departments of life reach their positions, it would seem a miracle that the number of incompetents in responsible positions is so small, if we were not obliged to assume that latent qualifications for the positions are very extensively present.

This incommensurability between the quantum of qualification for superior stations and the quantum of their possible exercise is perhaps to be explained by the difference between the character of men as members of groups and as individuals. The group as such is low and in need of guidance. The peculiarities which the group develops as simply common characteristics of the group are only those of subordination. So soon, however, as combinations of groups occur, that is, a formation of larger circles comes into being, it is necessary for the whole mass to organize itself in the form of subordination to a few. This does not prevent the possession of higher and finer characteristics by each person in this mass. These, however, are individual. In *various* respects they extend beyond the common possession, and consequently they do not raise from their low plane those qualities which are common to the members of the group as such. From this relation it follows, on the one hand, that the group as a whole needs a leader, and there must be many subordinate and few superiors; on the other hand, however, each individual of the group is more highly qualified, that is, as element of the group and as subordinate.

This enormous difficulty, which presents the sting and the

[1] Wem Gott ein Amt giebt, dem giebt er auch den Verstand dazu.

most radical incommensurability in all social formations, this antinomy between the just claim to superior relation and the technical impossibility of satisfying it, is overcome in the sociological respect by the principle of rank (*ständische Princip*), and the existing social order, by erecting classes pyramidally one above the other, with constantly diminishing numbers of members, and thereby *a priori* diminishing the number of those "qualified" for leading positions. Since in case of the equal right of all to all positions it would be impossible to satisfy every legitimate claim, the social order which includes ranks and classes provides at the outset for a limiting selection which pays no attention to the individual, but rather on the contrary determines the individual. In a multitude *a priori* equal, it is impossible to bring each to a suitable position; consequently this social arrangement might be considered as an attempt, on the contrary, from the point of view of the previously determined position, to discipline men for this preordained station. Whether a socialistic constitution, without such a prejudice for superordination and subordination, could fulfill its promises is to me doubtful. Under socialism, on the one hand, with removal of every accidental chance, only talent shall determine the attainment of position. On the other hand every talent shall find its appropriate station; that is, shall bring its highest potency to development, in consequence of which, according to the above explanations, there must be more superiors than inferiors, more to give orders than to execute them. By no means political organizations alone, but group formations of every kind and of every content labor under this difficulty, which rests in the last analysis upon the conflict between the individ ual totality of men and their character as an element of the group. The inferiority (*Niedrigkeit*) of the latter (group element) in comparison with the former (total individual) brings about the necessity that there shall be many subordinates and few superiors. The eminence of the former (total individual) in comparison with the latter (group element) amounts to necessity that there shall be incomparably more persons essentially and

potentially qualified for superior positions than there are such positions to be filled.

These specifications are intended to serve as an example of the peculiar process of abstraction upon which, according to my view, the claim of sociology to existence as a separate science must be based. The desideratum is to discern in the countless historical groupings the principles of group formation as such, in order that we may approximate the laws of the influences which human beings exert upon each other in their reciprocal contacts, — laws which in themselves are not affected by the material causes or purposes of these contacts, although the different contents of socialization will, of course, lead to various combinations, different degrees of strength, and different courses of development in these forms of contact. And as we reach a science of religion by turning our attention away from all other interests of life except religion, or at least by treating them merely as accidents; as we gain a science of language by abstracting language and its immediate psychological conditions from everything that lies beyond, although as a matter of fact there would never have been utterance without the excluded concrete motives, so we shall gain a sociology by seeking to recognize the laws, forms and developments of socialization (*Vergesellschaftung*) which to be sure in reality determine life only together with other functions and forces, which nevertheless can constitute the subject-matter of a distinct science only in abstraction from these other factors.[1]

GEORG SIMMEL.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BERLIN.

[1] Translated by ALBION W. SMALL.