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The Realm of Sociology as a Science¹

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I

A science hardly born has not, nor could it have at the beginning, anything but a vague and uncertain sense of that sector of reality toward which it should be oriented, or of its proper extent and limits; nor can it achieve a clearer self-image if its inquiries are not guided by some general rules. On the other hand it is extremely important that it should gain such a heightened awareness of its goals; for the scholar's progress is the more certain as he is better disciplined; and he becomes more systematic in his inquiry as he becomes more familiar with the character and limits of the territory he is exploring.

For sociology the time has come to bend every effort to make this forward step. Certainly when some belated critics—unwittingly under the influence of the prejudice which has always obdurately resisted the emergence of a new science—reproach sociology for not knowing precisely what its field of concern is, one can reply that such uncertainty is inevitable in the first phases of research and that our discipline was born only yesterday. We must not forget, especially in view of the favored position of sociology today, that it would not even have been possible during the past fifteen years to list ten names which were genuinely and accurately names of sociologists. And let us add that it is too much to require that a science bound its subject matter with meticulous precision: for that sector of reality which it aims to study is never set apart from other sectors cleanly and precisely. In reality everything in nature is bound up with everything else in such a way that there can be no break between the different sciences, no terribly precise frontiers. Yet despite all, it is important to develop as clear a notion as possible of the domain of sociology, to determine where it stands and to establish the dimensions or characteristics by which we recognize the complex of phenomena with which we are concerned, while at the same time not freezing frontiers which must remain indeterminate. This problem is all the more urgent for our discipline since, unless we take care,

its realm may be endlessly extended. For there is no phenomenon which doesn't emerge *in* society, from physical-chemical events to those genuinely social. Therefore these latter must be isolated with care lest sociology be reduced to a mere conventional label applied to an incoherent collection of disparate disciplines.

II

Simmel has made a significant attempt, almost an exaggerated one, to trace the limits of the field of sociology.² He starts with the notion that, if there is to be a sociology it must constitute an independent system of inquiry perfectly distinct from such preexisting sciences as political economy, history of civilization, statistics, demography, etc. Besides being something apart from these, it must also have another [different] field of inquiry. The difference resides in the fact that the other special sciences study what transpires *in* society, but not *the society itself*. The religious, moral, and juridical phenomena with which they are concerned emerge within determinate groups; but *the groups* in the midst of which they develop must be the targets of other investigation, independent of the preceding inquiries; and this is precisely the realm of sociology. Men living in society pursue, with the aid of the very society that they constitute, many different kinds of activities: some religious, others economic, and still others aesthetic, etc., and the special sciences have as their specific fields the particular processes by which these ends and these activities are achieved. But such processes are not in themselves social or at least they have this characteristic only indirectly and only to the extent that they develop in a collective context. Disciplines of this sort are not, then, properly speaking, sociological. In that complex which we usually refer to as *society* there are two sorts of elements which must be carefully discriminated: there is the *content*, that is to say the various phenomena which succeed one another amongst the associated individuals; and the *containing*, that is to say the association itself within which these phenomena are observed. The *association* is the only thing that is genuinely social and sociology is *the science of association in the abstract*. "Sociology should look for its problems, not in the content of social life, but in its form. Sociology's whole right to exist rests on this abstract consideration of *social forms*. So it is that geometry owes its existence to the possibility of abstracting their spatial forms from material things" (*l'Année sociologique*, 1898, I, 72).

But how can one achieve this abstraction? If it is true that all human associations are formed with particular ends in view, how can one isolate association-in-general from the various specific goals which such association serves, in order to determine the principles?

By bringing together associations aimed at quite different ends and abstracting from them what they have in common. In this way all the differences seen in the particular ends pursued and around which societies build themselves, are subordinated and the social form, alone, will emerge. So it is that something like the *formation of movements*, "schools," or parties is observed in the world of art as well as in politics, in industry as well as in religion. If, then, we investigate what is common to all these cases despite the diversity of ends and interests, we will get at the laws peculiar to this kind of grouping. The same method allows us to study *domination*, *subordination*, the formation of *hierarchies*, the *division of labor*, *competition*, etc. (*L'Année Sociologique*, 1898, 1, 72).

Now it might seem that in this way we have assigned sociology a clearly defined goal. In reality, we think that such a view serves only to keep sociology in a metaphysical state from which, on the contrary, it should above all else be emancipated. We do not deny the right of sociology to develop itself by means of abstract ideas, since there is no science which can develop in any other way. Only these abstractions must be systematically developed and follow the natural distinctions in the data. Otherwise they will necessarily degenerate into imaginary constructions and a useless mythology. The old political economy certainly claimed the right of abstraction and, in principle, one could not contest it; but the way in which it was used vitiated it, for it put as its fundamental postulate an abstraction that was unwarranted, namely the model of a man whose actions are exclusively motivated by personal interest. Such an hypothesis cannot be put at the beginning of a study; only repeated observations and systematic testing provide the opportunity to assess the propulsive force which such a motive may exert on us. We lack the means for affirming that certain sufficiently defined elements exist in us so that one may isolate them from other factors in our behavior and consider them separately. Who can say, e.g., if there is such a clear-cut distinction between egoism and altruism as common sense unreflectively acknowledges?

To justify the method advanced by Simmel it is not enough to summon the example of sciences which proceed through abstraction. It must be shown that the abstraction referred to is carried out according to the principles to which all scientific abstraction must conform. Now how are we warranted in making such a radical separation between form and content (*le contenant du contenu*) of society? He thinks it enough to assert that only form (*le contenant*) is by nature social and that the content of conduct has this character only indirectly. There is then no proof to buttress such a proposition which, far from being able to pass as a self-evident axiom, can be regarded by the scholar as a gratuitous assertion.

Of course, everything that happens in society is not social, but one cannot say the same for everything which develops in and through society. As a result, to cast outside of sociology the various phenomena which constitute the fabric of social life, it would have to be shown that such

phenomena are not the work of the collectivity, but that they have an altogether different origin and that they just happen to be placed in the general framework constituted by society. Now as we know, this demonstration has not been attempted nor has the research which it supposes been begun. Nonetheless, it is easy to see at a first glance that the traditions and common practices of religion, law, morality, and of the political economy are no less social phenomena than the external forms of sociability. And if one pushes the examination of these phenomena, this first impression is confirmed: everywhere one finds the work of society which generates these phenomena, and their repercussion on social organization is altogether clear. They are society itself, living and acting. What a queer notion it would be to imagine the group as a sort of empty form, any sort of mold whatsoever which could receive, indifferently, any sort of content! One may agree that there are structures of behavior that one encounters everywhere, whatever the nature of the particular ends pursued. And it is altogether evident that whatever the differences between these ends, there are also characteristics in common. But why should these latter alone have the character of the social to the exclusion of the former?

Not only is this use of abstraction methodologically unsound, since it results in separating things which have the same qualities; but the abstractions thus obtained—those they wish to make the object of the science—are altogether indeterminate. Indeed, what do expressions such as *social forms*, *forms of association in general*, mean? If we want to consider only the way in which persons are related to one another within an association, the dimensions of association, its density, in a word, its external and morphological characteristics, then the idea would be definite, but also too restricted to constitute by itself the sole object of a science; for it would reduce sociology to consideration alone of the substratum on which social life rests. But as a matter of fact, our author accords a much more sweeping significance to this term. He understands by it not only the ways of grouping, the static condition of the association, but the most general forms of social relationship. These are the most broadly conceived forms of relationships of all sorts which are bound into the life of society. And these are the phenomena which are presented to us as belonging directly to sociology such as, e.g., the *division of labor*, *competition*, *imitation*, the state of *freedom* or *dependence* in which the individual finds himself with respect to the group (*Révue de métaphysique et de Morale*, II, 499). But then, as between these relations and other more particular relationships, there is only a difference of degree: and how can a simple difference of this sort justify such a deep division between two orders of phenomena? If the first constitutes the subject matter of sociology, why should the second be excluded if they belong to the same species? The seemingly fundamental character of the abstraction proposed [by Simmel], an appearance deriving from the opposing of form to content [le contenant au contenu] disappears as soon

as one specifies more precisely the meaning of these terms and sees that they are only loosely used metaphors.

The most general aspect of social life is not the content or the form, any more than are the particular features that social life displays. We do not have here two species of reality which, although related, are distinct and dissociated, but rather phenomena of the same nature looked at at different levels of generality. But what, on the other hand, is the necessary degree of generality for such phenomena to be classified as sociological? No one can say: the question is one of those which can't be answered. We see how arbitrary such a criterion is and how one can, using it, extend or limit the boundaries of a discipline at will. Under the pretext of bounding the research, such a method in reality lends itself to individual whim. There is no rule, no guideline which allows one to determine in an objective fashion where the circle of sociological phenomena begins and ends. For not only are the limits flexible, which would be legitimate, but there is no reasonable explanation for their being put at one point rather than another. Add to this the fact that if we are to study the most general sort of social behaviors and their laws, we must know the laws of particular types since the former can't be studied and explained except through systematically relating them to the latter. From this perspective, every sociological problem assumes a thorough knowledge of all the special sciences that Simmel would wish to put outside sociology but without which it cannot exist. And since such universal erudition is impossible, one must content himself with a shorthand approach, materials hastily gathered and not rigorously handled. In fact, these are characteristics of Simmel's work. We appreciate their shrewdness and ingenuity; but we do not believe it possible to outline the chief divisions of our discipline as he understands them. We see no connections among the issues he suggests as objects of sociological inquiry. They are matters for reflection which do not tie together into a scientific system which forms a whole. Furthermore, the proofs he relies on are usually a number of examples. Facts are cited which are drawn from the most disparate sources and with no assessment of them, and consequently with no conception of their worth. If sociology is to merit the name of a science, it must consist in something other than a number of philosophical variations on the theme of social life, chosen more or less randomly, according to the inclinations of particular individuals. The problem must be posed so as to enable a logical solution.

III

It is not that there aren't really two different elements to distinguish in society, but rather that the distinction should be made in another way and should aim at dividing the realm of sociology, not in restricting it arbitrarily.

Social life is built out of various manifestations the nature of which we shall indicate in a moment. But whatever they are, they all have the common characteristic of having emerged from a group, simple or complex, which is their source. Now the study of the social substratum (*substrat social*) clearly is in the province of sociology. It is indeed the most immediately accessible matter for investigation by the sociologist since it is endowed with material form which our senses can discern. In reality, the makeup of society consists of certain combinations of persons and things which are necessarily registered in space. On the other hand, the explanatory analysis of this substratum should not be confused with the explanatory analysis of the social life which emerges on this foundation. The way in which society is formed is one matter and the way it acts quite another. These are two sorts of realities so different that they can't be treated with identical procedures and must be separated in research. The study of the first forms, then, a special branch, although a fundamental one, of sociology. We have here a distinction analogous to that which we see in all the natural sciences. Alongside chemistry which studies the makeup of elements, we have physics which inquires into all kinds of phenomena which are rooted in the various elements. Alongside physiology which investigates the principles of vital phenomena, there is anatomy or morphology which inquires into the structure of living beings, the way they are formed, and the conditions which govern them.

The chief problems which are posed as to the domain of sociology are the following:

The social substratum must above all be determined in its external form. This is chiefly a matter of: (1) the size of the territory; (2) the site occupied by a given society, that is to say, whether its location is central or peripheral in relation to the continents and the way it is hedged about by neighboring societies, etc.; (3) the form of its frontiers. In fact, as Ratzel has shown, the frontiers change in nature and aspect depending on the country concerned: here, they involve more or less extended surfaces; elsewhere, a geometric line defines them; in certain cases they intrude as a corner penetrates a neighboring country while elsewhere they bend back and thrust toward the interior, etc.

There is in addition the content, that is to say, in the first place the total mass of the population in terms of numbers and density. There are secondary groupings of differing importance within the body of society which have a material base such as the towns, cities, districts, and provinces. And as to each of them, there are always questions to pursue on the collectivity: how large is the area inhabited? What is the size of the town or the city? water sources? the outer boundaries? the number and density of population? etc.

Finally each group, taken as a whole or in part, uses the soil or some part of it according to its needs. Nations are surrounded with fortifications

and studded with fortified cities. Communications networks are built. The layout of streets and squares, the architecture of houses and buildings of all sorts vary from village to town, from metropolis to small city, etc. The social substratum will be differentiated in a thousand ways as man intervenes; and these differences have another sociological significance, either in terms of the causes which produce them or the effects that result from them. The presence or absence of walls, of markets, the building of public works, the differences in the relationship between these and private establishments, all these facts bear on essential matters in the collective life and at the same time combine to place a distinctive mark on a society.

But the sociologist's task is not simply to describe such diverse phenomena as those in the preceding enumeration (which does not pretend to be complete). He must contrive some explanations, that is to say, link such phenomena to their causes and determine their functions. He will raise the questions, e.g., why do societies, according to the stage of their development, prefer central sites to peripheral ones? what is the function of territory in the life of nations? how does it happen that frontiers come to take such and such a form? what circumstances have given rise to villages, then to cities? what makes for the development of urban centers? Now all these causes, and effects, necessarily involve changes. Little by little, under the influence of various forces, social elements arrange themselves in various forms. There are international migrations which determine the condition of nations, the nature of their functions; in fact, these bear a direct relationship to the expansive thrusts of each society. There are currents of internal migration which determine the relative importance of urban and rural populations. There are factors conditioning birth and death and so affecting the number in the general population. The tendency of a society to disperse or concentrate its population explains its density.

Hence this division of sociology is not simply that of a *static* science, and this is why we think it inappropriate to use this term³ which expresses poorly how society in itself should be considered; and no more does it express the fact that in reality it is not a matter of considering society at a given moment in time, frozen in an abstraction, but rather of analyzing and explaining its formation. Doubtless the phenomena which bear on structure are rather more stable than the functional phenomena; but there is only a difference of degree between the two orders of facts. Structure itself is revealed in society's *becoming* and one can only illuminate it on condition of not losing sight of this process of becoming. It [social structure] is constantly becoming and changing [forming and breaking down]; it is life having crystallized to a degree; and to distinguish it from the life from which it derives or the life that determines it amounts to dissociating inseparable things.⁴

IV

But the substratum of the collective life is not the only matter of social moment which exists in nature. That which issues from it or which is sustained by it necessarily has the same character and falls within the scope of the same science. Alongside social ways of being there are social manners of acting: along with morphological phenomena we have functional or physiological phenomena. Obviously the latter should be more numerous than the former; for the manifestations of vital phenomena are much more varied and complex than the morphological combinations which constitute the basic condition.

How may they be recognized? Where does this region of the collective life, that of social physiology begin and end?

First of all, it is clear that the generality of the phenomenon, by itself, would be a misleading index. The fact that a certain number of individuals behave in the same way does not prove that these like actions, even were they identical, are necessarily social, just as two persons do not constitute a group by the fact alone that they are neighbors and look alike. We must seek elsewhere for the distinctive criterion that we need.

Let us begin by asserting a proposition which may be taken as axiomatic: *If there is to be a true sociology, there must be certain phenomena produced in each society which are specifically caused by that society, which would not exist in the absence of that society and which are what they are only because society is as it is.* A science cannot establish itself when it lacks a subject matter *sui generis*, distinct from that which is the focus of inquiry for other sciences. If society were not to generate phenomena peculiar to itself and distinct from those observed in other realms of nature, sociology would have no subject matter of its own. For it to be able to have a *raison d'être*, there must be in reality some elements which merit being called *social* and which are not simply aspects of another order of things.

A corollary of these propositions is the following: social phenomena do not have their immediate and determining cause in the nature of individuals. As a matter of fact if it were otherwise, if they derived directly from the organic or physical makeup of man without any other factor intervening in their elaboration, sociology would reduce itself to psychology. Certainly it is true that all the functional phenomena of the social order are psychological in this sense that they all combine to make a way of thinking and acting. But if sociology can have a subject matter peculiar to itself, these collective ideas and actions must be different in nature from those which originate in the individual mind, and they must be framed in special laws. One might say that social physiology is a psychology, but only if one adds that it is a psychology which must under no conditions be confused with the science which is customarily so designated and which is exclusively committed to the study of the mental makeup of the individual.

This very simple statement runs athwart a very old sophistry to the influence of which some sociologists still unwittingly respond, unaware that it is the negation of sociology itself. It is said that society is only formed of individuals and that, since there can be nothing in the whole which is not found in the parts, everything which is social is reducible to individual factors. By this reasoning we would have to say that there is nothing in the living cell except what there is in the hydrogen, carbon, and nitrogen atoms which combine to form it. Yet obviously these atoms do not live. This way of reasoning that we have just indicated is radically false. It is not true that the whole is always equal to the sum of its parts. When elements are combined there emerges from their combination a new reality presenting entirely new qualities, sometimes quite contrary to those observed in the constituent elements. Two soft entities, copper and tin, form in their union one of the hardest materials that we know, bronze. Perhaps it will be contended that the properties revealed in the whole actually are preexistent, in a germinal state, in the parts. A germ is something which is not yet the whole that it will sometime be, but something which exists from this moment: it is a reality which has so far only fulfilled the first stage of its development, but which does exist in the present and which gives evidence of itself through characteristic phenomena. Now what is there in the mineral atoms which constitutes the living substance and discloses the slightest germ of life? Had they remained isolated from one another, if some unknown cause had not united them intimately, never would any of them have revealed any property whatsoever which could—other than in metaphor or by analogy—be described as biological. If, then, non-living elements can in uniting form a living being, there is nothing remarkably different in the fact that a joining of individual minds provides the field of action for phenomena *sui generis*, phenomena that these associated minds could not have produced simply through the force of their own natures.

Having made this point, we are in a position to specify a criterion in terms of which it will be possible to recognize the phenomena of social physiology. These phenomena cannot be considered physiological in the same sense as in dealing with the individual; for they are not of the sort which disclose themselves simply by developing their intrinsic properties. In other words, such phenomena can only become part of the individual as they are imposed on him from outside. They must exert some pressure on us if we are thus to be led beyond our individual natures. This pressure may not be noted, just as we may not be aware of atmospheric pressure on our bodies. It may be also that we capitulate without resistance. But wittingly or not, freely accepting or passively submitting, it is nonetheless real. This is what we meant in designating as *constraint* this characteristic property of social phenomena of imposing themselves on the individual (see *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, I). We do not mean by this that collective beliefs and behaviors must necessarily be inculcated in man through

violence and coercion. The force which prompts us to defer to them and to which we conform is not a material thing, or at least it is not necessarily material. If we submit unresistingly to the forces and mandates of society, it is not only because society is a more powerful being than we are. It is generally a moral authority which justifies all the outcomes of our activity and which bends our minds and wills. For everything coming from it is endowed with a prestige which inspires us in varying degrees with feelings of deference and respect. When we are confronted with modes of thought and action not of our making, which result from the collective experience (generally secular), we come to a halt, understanding that here in these forms of behavior there is something which goes beyond the ordinary permutations of the individual mind and which we cannot lightly dismiss. And this feeling is the more reenforced by what we feel when we go beyond or rebel against [the collective pattern]. Individual undertakings directed against social realities, either with the aim of destroying them or of altering them, always run into strong resistance. These forces, moral or not, against which the individual raises himself, react against him and attest to their superiority with the usually irresistible energy of their reaction.

The preceding analysis has been chiefly a dialectical one; and for the reason that we indicated. We were anxious to clarify from the beginning the characteristics of social facts, starting with this axiom: they are social, and therefore not individual. The reader in following our argument must have noticed the data which served to support it. There was a whole impressive group of beliefs and behaviors which reveal in the highest degree the characteristics just indicated; that is to say, beliefs and practices of religious, moral, and juridical life. All of them imply, to the very core, mandatory behaviors. All impose themselves normally by the respect they inspire, by the sense of obligation which prompts us to defer to them and, whenever we happen to run counter to them, by the coercive influence that they exert in the form of sanctions. This shows more clearly still in religious phenomena since the very way in which they are conceived shows that their reality comes from a source beyond the individual, since these phenomena are supposed to issue from an authority different from that with which man, as man, is endowed; and from a higher source. And so it is with law and with morality which, since they derive from religion, could not but have the same character, the latter like the former exacting strict obedience of us. Thus we can understand the authoritative tone in which we speak of Duty, or the way the popular imagination delights in acknowledging the voice of a being superior to man, a Divinity. The believer takes this symbolic manifestation literally and for him the religious or moral imperative is logically explained by the preeminent nature of the divine personality. For the scientist such a question doesn't arise since the domain of science does not go beyond the empirical universe. Science is not even concerned with knowing whether another reality exists. For it,

the only thing which is established is that there exist ways of acting and thinking which are obligatory and which, as a consequence, are distinguished from all other forms of behavior and of mental constructions (*représentation*). And from the fact that all sense of obligation presupposes some authority which obliges, superior to the subject who is obligated; and since, on the other hand, we do not know on the empirical level any authority superior to that of the individual if it is not the authority of the collectivity, we must therefore consider every phenomenon having this character as being of a social nature.

Consequently, even though these phenomena were the only ones presenting this distinctive characteristic, it is just as necessary that they be distinguished from other phenomena studied in individual psychology and assigned to another science. In this way sociology would have a field of inquiry which might appear restricted but which would at least be well defined. In reality there are other phenomena having the same characteristics, although to a lesser degree. Does not the language which we speak in our country resist the daring innovator with a force comparable to that felt by those who are inclined to violate religious rites, maxims of law and morality? There is something involved in language which inspires deference. Traditional customs, even when there is nothing of the religious or moral in them, feasts, the customs of courtesy, etc., fashions, themselves—these are protected by a great range of sanctions against individual inclinations to rebel. Also our economic organization imposes itself on us with an imperious necessity. If we try to rebel against it, we are not necessarily blamed for this reason alone; but we must add that such innovations often arouse resistances which are not altogether lacking in moral quality. It is appropriate to take account not only of the material impossibility of not conforming in large measure to the rules of the hallowed ways (*technique consacrée*), but also of the fact that this word “hallowed” is not an idle one. In industrial life as well as in other of our daily relationships, the traditional practices respected in our societies exert over us, at the least, an authority sufficient to restrain deviant tendencies, an authority which, however, being less, is less effective in curbing such tendencies than that deriving from moral rules. Nonetheless, there is only a difference in degree between them [these sorts of authority], a difference we need not now look into. In conclusion, social life is nothing other than the moral milieu, or better, the sum of the various moral contexts which surround the person. In calling them moral we mean that these *milieux* consist in a complex of ideas: as a result they are, with respect to individual minds, just as the physical setting is to living organisms. Both the moral and the physical *milieux* constitute independent realities, at least independent of one another to the extent that this can be in a world where everything is bound together. But the reality, the coercive force to which we submit, in the one instance our bodies, in another our wills, is not the same in the two cases

and does not derive from the same causes. The one stems from the intractability of molecular agents which constitute the physical reality and to which nature requires us to adapt. The other consists in this prestige *sui generis* with which social facts are endowed and which sustains them against threat of individual deviation.

We do not mean to assert, in addition, that social beliefs and behaviors insinuate themselves in invariant fashion in individuals. This would not accord with the facts. In dealing with collective institutions, in assimilating them, we render them individual, imprinting them with a more or less personal character, just as in apprehending the world of the senses each of us colors it according to his temperament so that we see many things differently, express things differently, deal with them differently in the same physical setting. This is why each of us, up to a point, formulates his own religious faith, his own cult, his own morality, his own ways of doing things. There is no social uniformity which does not admit a whole range of individual gradations. There is no collective fact which is imposed in a uniform manner on all persons.

This is not to deny, however, that the range of possible and tolerated variation is not always and everywhere more or less restricted. Virtually no variation is allowed in the moral and religious domain where innovation and reform are fatally viewed as crimes and sacrilege; while rather more is permitted in the realm of economic phenomena. But sooner or later there is, nonetheless, a limit beyond which we cannot go. This is why the characteristic of social phenomena is entirely found in the ascendancy which it exercises over particular [individual] minds.

As to external indices, there are at least two which seem relatively easy to use and especially appropriate. There are first of all the resistances with which social groups oppose individual deviations in ways of acting and thinking. It is very easy to see such resistances when they operate through specific sanctions, religious, legal, or moral. In all these cases, society directly imposes its will on the individual, requiring him to think and behave in determinate ways. It is this which reveals indisputably the social character of all obligatory rules in the realms of religion, law, and morality. Sometimes, however, social resistance is not so readily perceived and operates in less conscious and more hidden ways. Such is that which opposes too radical innovations in matters of economic methods. It is therefore useful to adopt another criterion which can be more easily applied in all cases: we shall find it in the special way in which social phenomena are inculcated in the individual. Since society imposes them on its members, these social phenomena must have a certain generality within the group to which they belong; since they derive from society, they cannot become part of individuals except by some process which moves from outside to inside. In fact, the rules of morality, the customs of courtesy, the opinions and traditional manners of our groups are brought home to us by

means of a common education; the rules of professional techniques, by way of technical education; articles of faith through religious education, etc. And what shall we say of the juridical rules, most of them being matters that we can live in ignorance of throughout a lifetime, so that we must consult with specialists when some need arises to know them? On the one hand, generality alone is not a sufficient criterion, as we have already shown; on the other hand, knowledge of the process through which social phenomena are implanted in individual minds would not, of itself, be a more adequate criterion for distinguishing the realm of sociology. For ideas and behaviors may be suggested to us which come from outside us and yet which involve nothing of society in them. But if we put these two specifications together they are, on the contrary, altogether characteristic [of social phenomena]. Ways of acting and thinking which are general in a given society, but that persons draw from outside themselves, can only owe their generality to the influence of the only moral milieu whose influence they feel, that is to say, the social milieu. *These impersonal norms of thought and action are those which constitute the sociological phenomenon par excellence and bear the same relationship to society as vital functions bear to the organism: they express the way in which the collective intelligence and will are manifested. They are, then, the appropriate material of social physiology.* [italics mine—E.K.W.]

At the same time that this definition delimits the field of sociological research, it serves to orient it. If one wishes to restrict himself, to reduce social phenomena to being merely more or less developed psychological phenomena, one is doomed to create a sociology that I may call facile, weak, and abstract. To tell the truth, under these conditions the task presented by sociology is relatively simple since, society having no laws of its own, there is none to discover. All that remains is to borrow from psychology the laws it thinks to have formulated and to inquire how the phenomena that it studies can be deduced [from such laws]. The only difficulty which might appear is the following: what becomes of those general faculties of human nature in the relationships of all sorts that men can have with one another? For the same reason, all detailed and concrete illustration of social phenomena, everything which reveals their richness and specificity, must necessarily escape. The province of the individual mind is too simple, too general, and too indeterminate to be able to take account of the phenomena seen in social beliefs and behaviors, the variety of their forms and the complexity of their character. These systems are consequently limited to developing with more or less ingenuity some quite schematic views, concepts altogether formal which, because vague or indeterminate, do not lend themselves to control. If, on the contrary, there is a social realm as different from the individual realm as the realm of biology is distinct from the mineral kingdom, then the domain of sociology includes an immense and unexplored world, involves unimagined forces—a

domain where, as a result, there are many discoveries to be made. We find ourselves confronted with unknowns which must be conquered and bent to human intelligence. Such a conquest is not easy. In such virgin territory we can only move slowly and circumspectly. To discover laws bearing on this complex reality, equally complex procedures must be adopted: it is not enough to observe, classify, and compare, but the methods of observation, classification, and comparison must be appropriate to the nature of this special study.

V

Now doubtless, sociology thus understood is still subject to Simmel's reproach. The phenomena with which it concerns itself have been studied by [other] sciences for a long time: population movements by demography; economic phenomena by political economy; religious beliefs and practices by the comparative history of religions; moral ideas in the history of civilization, etc. Would not sociology then be simply a label affixed to a more or less coherent cluster of old disciplines, being nothing new except in name?

But it is important to recall that if this criticism were justified, it would still not provide a good reason for arbitrarily limiting the term sociology to who-knows-what category of studies which have not been determined with any precision and which in any case have no right to such a distinction. But further, it is altogether inaccurate to say that in so joining under a given rubric these different special disciplines there is only involved a change of words. In fact, on the contrary, this change of name implies and provides the outward symbol for a profound change in things.

All the special sciences, political economy, comparative history of law and religion, demography, human geography, have until now been conceived and applied as though each constituted an independent whole when on the contrary the phenomena with which they deal are only diverse manifestations of one given activity, the collective activity. As a result the bonds which unite them are overlooked. Who, until quite recent times, would have suspected that there were relationships between economic and religious phenomena, between demographic adjustments and moral ideas, between geographic conditions and collective manifestations, etc.? A still more serious consequence of this isolation is that each science studied the phenomena of its own realm as though they were not linked with any social system. Consider the laws of political economy or, to be more precise, the propositions that the economists elevate to the status of laws! Quite independent of time and space, they seem to be altogether independent of any form of social organization. One would never think it possible to have clearcut economic types related to equally determinate social types, just as different digestive and respiratory apparatus is linked to the nature

of animal species. All the phenomena of the economic order are supposed to proceed in terms of very simple, very general movements common to all mankind. And quite similarly, comparative history of religions studies religious beliefs and practices as if they only expressed certain inner states of the individual mind; e.g., the fear that great natural forces inspire in man or the reflections which certain phenomena of life suggest to him, things like dreams, death, sleep. Only recently in the comparative history of law have there been some efforts at articulating some domestic institutions and certain forms of social organization: but how timid such efforts always are, embryonic, unsystematic, even though they have been particularly attempted by Post and his school and even though Post was a sociologist.⁵ Until Ratzel's time, who thought of seeing in political geography a social science or, more generally, an explanatory science in the real sense of the word?

This statement might, furthermore, be generalized. Much research not only has nothing of sociology in it but is only quasi-scientific. In failing to link social phenomena to the social milieu in which they have their roots, such inquiries remain suspended in mid-air, with no connection with the rest of the world, making it impossible to see the connections linking one to the other and to see their unity. Under these conditions it only remains to report these phenomena without classifying or explaining them, as the pure historian does, or even to collect general observations, indiscriminately, in terms of some schematic view in which [social phenomena] lose their identity. But such a method precludes success in determining definite relationships between definite classes of facts. Yet this is precisely what one calls *laws* in the most general sense of the word. Now where there are no laws can there be science?

It is unnecessary to explain at length how such a limitation will be eliminated as soon as *we see in the various sciences the branches of a single science which embraces them all and to which we give the name of Sociology.* [italics mine—E.K.W.] From the moment that one cultivates one of these disciplines, it is no longer possible to remain oblivious to the others; the phenomena which are studied in their reciprocity interdigitate like the functions of a given organism and are, as a result of this interlocking, intimately connected. At the same time, they appear to us in quite a different way. Products of society, we now see them as functions of society and not as functions of the individual, and as such can be rendered intelligible. Depending on the way in which society is constituted and on the way in which we are individually constituted, one can explain why these phenomena appear under one form rather than another. Hence they are no longer elusive, able to slip through the grasp of science; and they become a substratum by means of which they join again the rest of human phenomena. That is what they are, the social substratum; and so it is that we can succeed in establishing definite relationships between these facts and in determining laws, properly speaking.

Another cause, however, has contributed to this change in orientation. If one is to investigate the laws of social phenomena, he must first know what natural laws are and the methods by which one can discover them; such a sense (*intuition*) can only be picked up in the practice of the sciences in which discoveries of this sort are made every day, that is, in the natural sciences. Now the writers who devote themselves to special social studies, the economists and the historians, have a culture that is more literary than scientific. In general, they have only a very vague notion of what a law is. The historians systematically deny and forswear the existence of laws in the whole social domain; and as for the economists, they are notorious for confusing laws with abstract theorems which are simply expressed as ideological possibilities, having nothing in common with the word *law* as it is used in physics, chemistry, or biology. Quite to the contrary, the thinkers who first used the word sociology and who, as a result, anticipated the affinity of all these phenomena which seemed up to then independent of one another, Comte and Spencer, were quite abreast of the methods used in the natural sciences and with the principles on which they are founded. Sociology was born in the shadow of these sciences; and in intimate contact with them it drew into its own sphere of action all these special social sciences that it comprises in principle and which today find themselves informed with a new spirit. It goes without saying that among the first sociologists, some were wrong in exaggerating this relationship to the point of failing to understand the independence of the social sciences and the autonomy which they must enjoy with respect to the other sciences which preceded them. But this excess should not lead us to forget how much of value there is in these principal seats of scientific thought.

We must admit then that this term sociology with the meaning we have given it is not a simple addition to the vocabulary, but that it is and remains the sign of a thorough reshaping of all the sciences investigating human affairs;⁶ and this is the task of sociology in the present day scientific movement. Under the influence of the ideas represented in this word, all the studies, which up to now have taken their source rather from literature or in scholarly erudition, show that their real affinities are elsewhere and that they seek their model in a quite different direction. Rather than stopping with the consideration of events on the surface of social life, we feel the need for investigating the deeper wellsprings of social life, the intimate sources, the impersonal and hidden forces which motivate persons and the collectivity. Such an inclination has already been seen among the historians; but it belongs to sociology to provide this tendency with a clearer consciousness, to clarify and develop this tendency. Certainly the movement is still in its beginnings; but there is already a good start, and at the present our task is simply to speed it up and give it specific direction.

We are not, however, saying that sociology ought always to limit itself to being only a system of special sciences. If all the phenomena that these sciences observe are related, if they are only species of a given genus,

there is reason to ask what it is that makes for the unity of the genus itself, and this is the task of a special branch of sociology. Society, social life in the whole reach of its development, forms a whole. And a science does not cover this whole, since it studies the elements of the whole, separately. Following analysis, there must be synthesis, showing how the elements are joined into a whole. This is the justification for a *Sociologie générale*. If all social phenomena present certain common characteristics, it is because they all derive from the same source or from roots of the same species. It is the task of general sociology to find these primary roots.

In matters of morphology, sociology will inquire what is the elementary group which gives birth to increasingly complex groups. As to physiology, it will ask what the elementary functional phenomena are which, in their combinations and permutations, have progressively formed the increasingly complex phenomena which have emerged in the course of evolution. But the worthwhileness of the synthesis clearly depends on the value of the analysis with which the special sciences concern themselves. Hence it is necessary for us to attend to and develop these special disciplines. This last seems the most urgent task confronting sociology today.

Notes

1. This translation was done in 1960 from an Appendix in Armand Cuvillier's 1953 essay, *Où va la sociologie française?* Cuvillier justifies the republication of Durkheim's paper (carried by the *Rivista italiana di sociologia* in 1900) by saying that:

We thought it useful to translate and publish it here in an appendix since Durkheim, in this paper, opposes his conception of sociology to the purely formalistic conception of Georg Simmel and, as I have indicated at many points in the foregoing work [reference is to *Où va la sociologie française?*—E.K.W.] many of his criticisms seem still valid as they apply to certain conceptions of sociology currently in vogue. Furthermore, it is of some interest to compare the concept of social morphology as he develops it here (cf. *Division du travail social*, liv. II, Chapter 2, and *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, Chapter 5, Part III) with other interpretations of the idea of form in sociology—A.C.

2. See his article on "le probleme de la sociologie," in the *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, Vol. II, September, 1894, p. 497, and his memoir or monograph, "Comment les formes sociales se maintiennent," in *l'Année Sociologique*, Vol. I, 1898, pp. 71–109—E.D.

3. The allusion here is to the *Statique sociale* of Auguste Comte—A.C.

4. We see here how inaccurate it is to accuse Durkheim, as is still often done, of having perceived only the crystallized or frozen aspects of social life—A.C.

5. Here Durkheim refers to a German jurist and ethnologist, Albert Hermann Post (1839–95) who sought to link varying legal forms with changing family patterns; and to uncover stages of social evolution. Friedrich Ratzel (1840–1904) was a human geographer influential in support of the view that cultural patterns and social forms are shaped by the physical environment—E.K.W.

6. And psychology, too, is destined to feel some changes under this influence. If social phenomena penetrate the person from the outside, there is a whole realm of individual consciousness which depends in part on social causes and which psychology cannot abstract [disregard] without becoming unintelligible—E.D.