

THE RULES
OF SOCIOLOGICAL
METHOD

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EIGHTH EDITION, TRANSLATED BY

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THE FREE PRESS

A Division of *Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc.*
NEW YORK

Collier Macmillan Publishers
LONDON

TRANSLATORS' NOTE

The translators desire to express sincere gratitude to Dr. N. C. Leites, graduate student of Cornell University, for his generous aid and suggestions in the work of translation.

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is but a long endeavor to give this principle precision, to deepen it, and to develop all the consequences it implies. In spite of the great advances which have been made in this direction, it will be clear, from what follows in this work, that numerous survivals of the anthropocentric bias still remain and that here, as elsewhere, they bar the way to science. It displeases man to renounce the unlimited power over the social order he has so long attributed to himself; and on the other hand, it seems to him that, if collective forces really exist, he is necessarily obliged to submit to them without being able to modify them. This makes him inclined to deny their existence. In vain have repeated experiences taught him that this omnipotence, the illusion of which he complacently entertains, has always been a cause of weakness in him; that his power over things really began only when he recognized that they have a nature of their own, and resigned himself to learning this nature from them. Rejected by all other sciences, this deplorable prejudice stubbornly maintains itself in sociology. Nothing is more urgent than to liberate our science from it, and this is the principal purpose of our efforts.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Until the present, sociologists have given little thought to describing and defining the method they employ in the study of social facts. Thus, in the entire work of Spencer the problem of methodology occupies no place, for *The Study of Sociology*, perhaps a misleading title, is devoted to demonstrating the difficulties and possibilities of sociology, not to expounding the methods it ought to use. Mill, it is true, has dealt at great length with the question;¹ but he has only refined with his dialectics what Comte had already expounded, without adding anything really original. A chapter in the *Cours de philosophie positive*² is, then, almost the only original and important study we have on the matter.

This apparent neglect need not surprise us; for the great sociologists whose names we have just recalled seldom advanced beyond vague generalities on the nature of societies, on the relations between the social and the biological realms, and on the general march of progress. Even the voluminous sociology of Spencer has scarcely any other purpose than to show how the law of universal evolution applies to human societies. Certainly no special and complex methods are required for the treatment of these philosophical questions. Sociologists have been content, therefore, to compare the merits of deduction and induction and to make a superficial inquiry into the most general means and methods at the command of the sociological investigators. But the precautions to be taken in the observation of facts, the manner in

¹ *System of Logic* (1st ed.), Vol. VI, chaps. vii-xiii.

² See 2d ed., pp. 294-336.

which the principal problems should be formulated, the direction research should take, the specific methods of work which may enable it to reach its conclusions—all these remained completely undetermined.

A happy combination of circumstances, among the most important of which may rightly be placed the proposal to establish a regular course in sociology in the Faculty of Letters at Bordeaux, enabled us to devote ourselves early to the study of social science and, indeed, to make it our vocation. Therefore, we have been able to abandon these very general questions and to attack a certain number of definite problems. The very force of events has thus led us to construct a method that is, we believe, more precise and more exactly adapted to the distinctive characteristics of social phenomena. We wish here to expound the results of our work in applied sociology in their entirety and to submit them for discussion. They are, of course, contained by implication in the book which we published recently on the *Division in Social Labor*. But it seems to us that it is of some advantage to make them explicit and to give them separate formulation, accompanying them with proofs and illustrations drawn either from that work or from works still unpublished. The public will thus be better able to judge of the direction we are trying to give to sociological studies.

CHAPTER I

WHAT IS A SOCIAL FACT?

Before inquiring into the method suited to the study of social facts, it is important to know which facts are commonly called "social." This information is all the more necessary since the designation "social" is used with little precision. It is currently employed for practically all phenomena generally diffused within society, however small their social interest. But on that basis, there are, as it were, no human events that may not be called social. Each individual drinks, sleeps, eats, reasons; and it is to society's interest that these functions be exercised in an orderly manner. If, then, all these facts are counted as "social" facts, sociology would have no subject matter exclusively its own, and its domain would be confused with that of biology and psychology.

But in reality there is in every society a certain group of phenomena which may be differentiated from those studied by the other natural sciences. When I fulfil my obligations as brother, husband, or citizen, when I execute my contracts, I perform duties which are defined, externally to myself and my acts, in law and in custom. Even if they conform to my own sentiments and I feel their reality subjectively, such reality is still objective, for I did not create them; I merely inherited them through my education. How many times it happens, moreover, that we are ignorant of the details of the obligations incumbent upon us, and that in order to acquaint ourselves with them we must consult the law and its authorized interpreters! Similarly, the church-member

finds the beliefs and practices of his religious life ready-made at birth; their existence prior to his own implies their existence outside of himself. The system of signs I use to express my thought, the system of currency I employ to pay my debts, the instruments of credit I utilize in my commercial relations, the practices followed in my profession, etc., function independently of my own use of them. And these statements can be repeated for each member of society. Here, then, are ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that present the noteworthy property of existing outside the individual consciousness.

These types of conduct or thought are not only external to the individual but are, moreover, endowed with coercive power, by virtue of which they impose themselves upon him, independent of his individual will. Of course, when I fully consent and conform to them, this constraint is felt only slightly, if at all, and is therefore unnecessary. But it is, nonetheless, an intrinsic characteristic of these facts, the proof thereof being that it asserts itself as soon as I attempt to resist it. If I attempt to violate the law, it reacts against me so as to prevent my act before its accomplishment, or to nullify my violation by restoring the damage, if it is accomplished and reparable, or to make me expiate it if it cannot be compensated for otherwise.

In the case of purely moral maxims, the public conscience exercises a check on every act which offends it by means of the surveillance it exercises over the conduct of citizens, and the appropriate penalties at its disposal. In many cases the constraint is less violent, but nevertheless it always exists. If I do not submit to the conventions of society, if in my dress I do not conform to the customs observed in my country and in my class, the ridicule I provoke, the social

isolation in which I am kept, produce, although in an attenuated form, the same effects as a punishment in the strict sense of the word. The constraint is nonetheless efficacious for being indirect. I am not obliged to speak French with my fellow-countrymen nor to use the legal currency, but I cannot possibly do otherwise. If I tried to escape this necessity, my attempt would fail miserably. As an industrialist, I am free to apply the technical methods of former centuries; but by doing so, I should invite certain ruin. Even when I free myself from these rules and violate them successfully, I am always compelled to struggle with them. When finally overcome, they make their constraining power sufficiently felt by the resistance they offer. The enterprises of all innovators, including successful ones, come up against resistance of this kind.

Here, then, is a category of facts with very distinctive characteristics: it consists of ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion, by reason of which they control him. These ways of thinking could not be confused with biological phenomena, since they consist of representations and of actions; nor with psychological phenomena, which exist only in the individual consciousness and through it. They constitute, thus, a new variety of phenomena; and it is to them exclusively that the term "social" ought to be applied. And this term fits them quite well, for it is clear that, since their source is not in the individual, their substratum can be no other than society, either the political society as a whole or some one of the partial groups it includes, such as religious denominations, political, literary, and occupational associations, etc. On the other hand, this term "social" applies to them exclusively, for it has a distinct meaning only if it

designates exclusively the phenomena which are not included in any of the categories of facts that have already been established and classified. These ways of thinking and acting therefore constitute the proper domain of sociology. It is true that, when we define them with this word "constraint," we risk shocking the zealous partisans of absolute individualism. For those who profess the complete autonomy of the individual, man's dignity is diminished whenever he is made to feel that he is not completely self-determinant. It is generally accepted today, however, that most of our ideas and our tendencies are not developed by ourselves but come to us from without. How can they become a part of us except by imposing themselves upon us? This is the whole meaning of our definition. And it is generally accepted, moreover, that social constraint is not necessarily incompatible with the individual personality.¹

Since the examples that we have just cited (legal and moral regulations, religious faiths, financial systems, etc.) all consist of established beliefs and practices, one might be led to believe that social facts exist only where there is some social organization. But there are other facts without such crystallized form which have the same objectivity and the same ascendancy over the individual. These are called "social currents." Thus the great movements of enthusiasm, indignation, and pity in a crowd do not originate in any one of the particular individual consciousnesses. They come to each one of us from without and can carry us away in spite of ourselves. Of course, it may happen that, in abandoning myself to them unreservedly, I do not feel the pressure they exert upon me. But it is revealed as soon as I try to resist

¹ We do not intend to imply, however, that all constraint is normal. We shall return to this point later.

them. Let an individual attempt to oppose one of these collective manifestations, and the emotions that he denies will turn against him. Now, if this power of external coercion asserts itself so clearly in cases of resistance, it must exist also in the first-mentioned cases, although we are unconscious of it. We are then victims of the illusion of having ourselves created that which actually forced itself from without. If the complacency with which we permit ourselves to be carried along conceals the pressure undergone, nevertheless it does not abolish it. Thus, air is no less heavy because we do not detect its weight. So, even if we ourselves have spontaneously contributed to the production of the common emotion, the impression we have received differs markedly from that which we would have experienced if we had been alone. Also, once the crowd has dispersed, that is, once these social influences have ceased to act upon us and we are alone again, the emotions which have passed through the mind appear strange to us, and we no longer recognize them as ours. We realize that these feelings have been impressed upon us to a much greater extent than they were created by us. It may even happen that they horrify us, so much were they contrary to our nature. Thus, a group of individuals, most of whom are perfectly inoffensive, may, when gathered in a crowd, be drawn into acts of atrocity. And what we say of these transitory outbursts applies similarly to those more permanent currents of opinion on religious, political, literary, or artistic matters which are constantly being formed around us, whether in society as a whole or in more limited circles.

To confirm this definition of the social fact by a characteristic illustration from common experience, one need only observe the manner in which children are brought up. Con-

sidering the facts as they are and as they have always been, it becomes immediately evident that all education is a continuous effort to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling, and acting which he could not have arrived at spontaneously. From the very first hours of his life, we compel him to eat, drink, and sleep at regular hours; we constrain him to cleanliness, calmness, and obedience; later we exert pressure upon him in order that he may learn proper consideration for others, respect for customs and conventions, the need for work, etc. If, in time, this constraint ceases to be felt, it is because it gradually gives rise to habits and to internal tendencies that render constraint unnecessary; but nevertheless it is not abolished, for it is still the source from which these habits were derived. It is true that, according to Spencer, a rational education ought to reject such methods, allowing the child to act in complete liberty; but as this pedagogic theory has never been applied by any known people, it must be accepted only as an expression of personal opinion, not as a fact which can contradict the aforementioned observations. What makes these facts particularly instructive is that the aim of education is, precisely, the socialization of the human being; the process of education, therefore, gives us in a nutshell the historical fashion in which the social being is constituted. This unremitting pressure to which the child is subjected is the very pressure of the social milieu which tends to fashion him in its own image, and of which parents and teachers are merely the representatives and intermediaries.

It follows that sociological phenomena cannot be defined by their universality. A thought which we find in every individual consciousness, a movement repeated by all individuals, is not thereby a social fact. If sociologists have been

satisfied with defining them by this characteristic, it is because they confused them with what one might call their reincarnation in the individual. It is, however, the collective aspects of the beliefs, tendencies, and practices of a group that characterize truly social phenomena. As for the forms that the collective states assume when refracted in the individual, these are things of another sort. This duality is clearly demonstrated by the fact that these two orders of phenomena are frequently found dissociated from one another. Indeed, certain of these social manners of acting and thinking acquire, by reason of their repetition, a certain rigidity which on its own account crystallizes them, so to speak, and isolates them from the particular events which reflect them. They thus acquire a body, a tangible form, and constitute a reality in their own right, quite distinct from the individual facts which produce it. Collective habits are inherent not only in the successive acts which they determine but, by a privilege of which we find no example in the biological realm, they are given permanent expression in a formula which is repeated from mouth to mouth, transmitted by education, and fixed even in writing. Such is the origin and nature of legal and moral rules, popular aphorisms and proverbs, articles of faith wherein religious or political groups condense their beliefs, standards of taste established by literary schools, etc. None of these can be found entirely reproduced in the applications made of them by individuals, since they can exist even without being actually applied.

No doubt, this dissociation does not always manifest itself with equal distinctness, but its obvious existence in the important and numerous cases just cited is sufficient to prove that the social fact is a thing distinct from its individual manifestations. Moreover, even when this disassocia-

tion is not immediately apparent, it may often be disclosed by certain devices of method. Such dissociation is indispensable if one wishes to separate social facts from their alloys in order to observe them in a state of purity. Currents of opinion, with an intensity varying according to the time and place, impel certain groups either to more marriages, for example, or to more suicides, or to a higher or lower birth-rate, etc. These currents are plainly social facts. At first sight they seem inseparable from the forms they take in individual cases. But statistics furnish us with the means of isolating them. They are, in fact, represented with considerable exactness by the rates of births, marriages, and suicides, that is, by the number obtained by dividing the average annual total of marriages, births, suicides, by the number of persons whose ages lie within the range in which marriages, births, and suicides occur.* Since each of these figures contains all the individual cases indiscriminately, the individual circumstances which may have had a share in the production of the phenomenon are neutralized and, consequently, do not contribute to its determination. The average, then, expresses a certain state of the group mind (*l'état collectif*).

Such are social phenomena, when disentangled from all foreign matter. As for their individual manifestations, these are indeed, to a certain extent, social, since they partly reproduce a social model. Each of them also depends, and to a large extent, on the organopsychological constitution of the individual and on the particular circumstances in which he is placed. Thus they are not sociological phenomena in the strict sense of the word. They belong to two realms at once; one could call them sociopsychological. They interest

* Suicides do not occur at every age, and they take place with varying intensity at the different ages in which they occur.

the sociologist without constituting the immediate subject matter of sociology. There exist in the interior of organisms similar phenomena, compound in their nature, which form in their turn the subject matter of the "hybrid sciences," such as physiological chemistry, for example.

The objection may be raised that a phenomenon is collective only if it is common to all members of society, or at least to most of them—in other words, if it is truly general. This may be true; but it is general because it is collective (that is, more or less obligatory), and certainly not collective because general. It is a group condition repeated in the individual because imposed on him. It is to be found in each part because it exists in the whole, rather than in the whole because it exists in the parts. This becomes conspicuously evident in those beliefs and practices which are transmitted to us ready-made by previous generations; we receive and adopt them because, being both collective and ancient, they are invested with a particular authority that education has taught us to recognize and respect. It is, of course, true that a vast portion of our social culture is transmitted to us in this way; but even when the social fact is due in part to our direct collaboration, its nature is not different. A collective emotion which bursts forth suddenly and violently in a crowd does not express merely what all the individual sentiments had in common; it is something entirely different, as we have shown. It results from their being together, a product of the actions and reactions which take place between individual consciousnesses; and if each individual consciousness echoes the collective sentiment, it is by virtue of the special energy resident in its collective origin. If all hearts beat in unison, this is not the result of a spontaneous and pre-established harmony but rather because an identical

force propels them in the same direction. Each is carried along by all.

We thus arrive at the point where we can formulate and delimit in a precise way the domain of sociology. It comprises only a limited group of phenomena. A social fact is to be recognized by the power of external coercion which it exercises or is capable of exercising over individuals, and the presence of this power may be recognized in its turn either by the existence of some specific sanction or by the resistance offered against every individual effort that tends to violate it. One can, however, define it also by its diffusion within the group, provided that, in conformity with our previous remarks, one takes care to add as a second and essential characteristic that its own existence is independent of the individual forms it assumes in its diffusion. This last criterion is perhaps, in certain cases, easier to apply than the preceding one. In fact, the constraint is easy to ascertain when it expresses itself externally by some direct reaction of society, as is the case in law, morals, beliefs, customs, and even fashions. But when it is only indirect, like the constraint which an economic organization exercises, it cannot always be so easily detected. Generality combined with externality may, then, be easier to establish. Moreover, this second definition is but another form of the first; for if a mode of behavior whose existence is external to individual consciousness becomes general, this can only be brought about by its being imposed upon them.³

³ It will be seen how this definition of the social fact diverges from that which forms the basis of the ingenious system of M. Tardé. First of all, we wish to state that our researches have nowhere led us to observe that preponderant influence in the genesis of collective facts which M. Tardé attributes to imitation. Moreover, from the preceding definition, which is not a theory but simply a résumé of the immediate data of observation, it

But these several phenomena present the same characteristic by which we defined the others. These "ways of existing" are imposed on the individual precisely in the same fashion as the "ways of acting" of which we have spoken. Indeed, when we wish to know how a society is divided politically, of what these divisions themselves are composed, and how complete is the fusion existing between them, we shall not achieve our purpose by physical inspection and by geographical observations; for these phenomena are social, even when they have some basis in physical nature. It is only by a study of public law that a comprehension of this organization is possible, for it is this law that determines the organization, as it equally determines our domestic and civil relations. This political organization is, then, no less obligatory than the social facts mentioned above. If the population crowds into our cities instead of scattering into the country, this is due to a trend of public opinion, a collective drive that imposes this concentration upon the individuals. We can no more choose the style of our houses than of our clothing—at least, both are equally obligatory. The channels of communication prescribe the direction of internal migrations and commerce, etc., and seems indeed to follow, not only that imitation does not always express the essential and characteristic features of the social fact, but even that it never expresses them. No doubt, every social fact is imitated; it has, as we have just shown, a tendency to become general, but that is because it is social, i.e., obligatory. Its power of expansion is not the cause but the consequence of its sociological character. If, further, only social facts produced this consequence, imitation could perhaps serve, if not to explain them, at least to define them. But an individual condition which produces a whole series of effects remains individual nevertheless. Moreover, one may ask whether the word "imitation" is indeed fitted to designate an effect due to a coercive influence. Thus, by this single expression, very different phenomena, which ought to be distinguished, are confused.

even their extent. Consequently, at the very most, it should be necessary to add to the list of phenomena which we have enumerated as presenting the distinctive criterion of a social fact only one additional category, "ways of existing"; and, as this enumeration was not meant to be rigorously exhaustive, the addition would not be absolutely necessary.

Such an addition is perhaps not necessary, for these "ways of existing" are only crystallized "ways of acting." The political structure of a society is merely the way in which its component segments have become accustomed to live with one another. If their relations are traditionally intimate, the segments tend to fuse with one another, or, in the contrary case, to retain their identity. The type of habitation imposed upon us is merely the way in which our contemporaries and our ancestors have been accustomed to construct their houses. The methods of communication are merely the channels which the regular currents of commerce and migrations have dug, by flowing in the same direction. To be sure, if the phenomena of a structural character alone presented this permanence, one might believe that they constituted a distinct species. A legal regulation is an arrangement no less permanent than a type of architecture, and yet the regulation is a "physiological" fact. A simple moral maxim is assuredly somewhat more malleable, but it is much more rigid than a simple professional custom or a fashion. There is thus a whole series of degrees without a break in continuity between the facts of the most articulated structure and those free currents of social life which are not yet definitely molded. The differences between them are, therefore, only differences in the degree of consolidation they present. Both are simply life, more or less crystallized. No doubt, it may be of some advantage to reserve the term "morphological"

for those social facts which concern the social substratum, but only on condition of not overlooking the fact that they are of the same nature as the others. Our definition will then include the whole relevant range of facts if we say: *A social fact is every way of acting, fixed or not, capable of exercising on the individual an external constraint; or again, every way of acting which is general throughout a given society, while at the same time existing in its own right independent of its individual manifestations.*⁴

⁴ This close connection between life and structure, organ and function, may be easily proved in sociology because between these two extreme terms there exists a whole series of immediately observable intermediate stages which show the bond between them. Biology is not in the same favorable position. But we may well believe that the inductions on this subject made by sociology are applicable to biology and that, in organisms as well as in societies, only differences in degree exist between these two orders of facts.

CHAPTER IV

RULES FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF SOCIAL TYPES

Since a social fact can be construed as normal or abnormal only relatively to a given social species, it is implied that one branch of sociology must be devoted to the constitution and classification of these species.

This concept of the social species has the very great advantage of furnishing us a middle ground between the two opposite conceptions of collective life which have for a long time divided the ranks of scholars: the nominalism of historians,¹ and the extreme realism of philosophers. For the historian, societies represent just so many heterogeneous individualities, not comparable among themselves. Each people has its own physiognomy, its special constitution, its law, its morality, its economic organization, appropriate only to itself; and all generalizations are well-nigh impossible. For the philosopher, on the contrary, all these individual groupings, called tribes, city-states, and nations, are only contingent and provisional aggregations with no exclusive and separate reality. Only humanity is real, and it is from the general attributes of human nature that all social evolution flows.

For the former, consequently, history is but a sequence of events which follow without repeating one another; for the latter, these same events have value and interest only

¹ I call it thus because it has been frequent among historians, but I do not mean that it is found in all historians.

as illustrating the general laws inherent in the constitution of man and dominating all historical development. For the former, what is good for one society cannot be applied to others. The conditions of the state of health vary from one people to the next and cannot be theoretically determined; it is a matter of practical experience and of cautious research. For the latter, they can be calculated once and for all and for the entire human species. It seems, then, that social reality must be merely subject matter of an abstract and vague philosophy or for purely descriptive monographs. But one escapes from this alternative once one has recognized that, between the confused multitude of historic societies and the single, but ideal, concept of humanity, there are intermediaries, namely, social species. In the latter are united both the unity that all truly scientific research demands and the diversity that is given in the facts, since the species is the same for all the individual units that make it up, and since, on the other hand, the species differ among themselves. It remains true that moral, legal, and economic institutions, etc., are infinitely variable; but these variations are not of such a nature that they deny all scientific treatment.

It was because he failed to appreciate the existence of social species that Comte thought he could represent the progress of all human societies as identical with that of a single people "to which would be ideally transferred all the consecutive modifications observed in distinct peoples."²

If one single social species exists, individual societies can differ among themselves only in degree, according as they present more or less completely the component traits of this unique species, i. e., according as they express humanity

² *Cours de philosophie positive*, IV, 263.

more or less perfectly. If, on the contrary, social types exist, qualitatively distinct from one another, one will try in vain to draw them together. They cannot be joined like the identical sections of a straight line in geometry. Historical development thus loses the ideal and simple continuity attributed to it; it breaks up, so to speak, into a multitude of fragments which, because they specifically differ from one another, cannot be joined together in a unified manner. The famous metaphor of Pascal, which has since been repeated by Comte, is, from this point of view, entirely untrue. But how shall we constitute these species?

I

It may seem, at the outset, that no other manner of procedure exists than to study each particular society, to make as exact and complete a monograph of it as possible, then to compare all these monographs among themselves to see wherein they are the same and wherein they diverge, and then, according to the relative importance of these similarities and divergences, to classify the peoples into groups according to their similarities or differences. In support of this method, we may say that it is the only method acceptable in a science of observation. If the species is only the sum of individual societies, how, then, can we describe it if one does not begin by describing each one of them and by describing them completely? Is it not the rule in science to rise to the general only after having observed the particular and that in its entirety? For this reason it has sometimes been thought necessary to postpone sociological analysis to the infinitely distant date when history, in its study of particular societies, will have arrived at results sufficiently objective and definite to be capable of useful comparison.

But, in reality, this circumspection is scientific in appearance only. It is not true that science can institute laws only after having reviewed all the facts they express, and can establish classes only after having described, in their entirety, the individuals they comprise. The true experimental method tends rather to substitute for common sense facts (which provide proofs only when they are very numerous and which, consequently, permit conclusions that are always doubtful)—*decisions* or crucial facts, which, by themselves and independently of their number, have scientific value and interest, as Bacon has pointed out.³ This procedure is especially important when it is a question of constituting genera and species. For, to make an inventory of all the characteristics belonging to an individual is an impossible task. Every individual is an infinity, and infinity cannot be exhausted. Shall they confine themselves to the most essential properties? But by what principle shall the choice be made? For such purposes a criterion which extends beyond the individual is necessary; such a criterion even the best-constructed monographs could not supply. Without even carrying matters to this extreme, we can foresee that, as the characteristics which form the basis of the classification become more numerous, it will also be more difficult to find resemblances and differences sufficiently distinct to permit the constitution of definite groups and subgroups because of the diverse ways in which they combine in individual cases.

But even if a classification by this method were possible, it would have the very great failing of not rendering the services which are expected from it. A satisfactory method must, above all, aim at facilitating scientific work by sub-

³ *Novum organum*, Vol. II, § 36.

stituting a limited number of types for the indefinite multiplicity of individuals. But it loses this advantage if the types have only been constituted after all the individuals have been reviewed and entirely analyzed. It can scarcely facilitate research if it only sums up researches already accomplished. It will only be truly useful if it permits us to classify other characteristics than those serving as its basis and if it procures for us a framework for the facts to come. Its role is to put in our hands points of reference to which we can refer other observations than those which have furnished us with these very points of reference. But for this purpose it must be made not from a complete inventory of all the individual characteristics but from a small number of them, carefully chosen. Under these conditions it will serve not only to put into some order knowledge already acquired but also to make new knowledge. It will spare the observer many steps because it will guide him wisely. Once the classification is established on this principle, in order to know whether a fact is general throughout a species it will be unnecessary to observe all societies of this species; a few will suffice. Even one well-made observation will be enough in many cases, just as one well-constructed experiment often suffices for the establishment of a law.

We must, then, choose the most essential characteristics for our classification. It is true that we can know them only when the explanation of the facts is sufficiently advanced. These two parts of the science are inseparable, and each progresses through the other. Without entering, however, too far into the study of the facts, it is not difficult to conjecture in what quarter we must seek the characteristic properties of the social types. We know that societies are composed of various parts in combination. Since the nature

of the aggregate depends necessarily on the nature and number of the *component elements and their mode of combination*, these characteristics are evidently what we must take as our basis; and we shall see from what follows that it is on them that the general facts of social life depend. Moreover, as they are of the morphological order, one could call the part of sociology which has for its task the constitution and classification of social types, "social morphology."

The principle of this classification can be given even greater precision. We know, indeed, that the constituent parts of every society are societies more simple than itself. A people is produced by the union of two or more pre-existent peoples. If, then, we understand the most simple society that has ever existed, to make our classification we should have only to follow the way these simple societies form compounds and how these compound societies combine again to form more complex wholes.

II

Spencer understood very well that the methodical classification of social types could have no other foundation. "We have seen," he said, "that social evolution begins with small, simple aggregates; that it progresses by the clustering of these into larger aggregates; and that after being consolidated, such clusters are united with others like themselves into still larger aggregates. Our classification, then, must begin with the societies of the first or simplest order."⁴

Unfortunately, to put this principle into practice it would be necessary to begin by defining with precision what is meant by a simple society. Not only does Spencer omit this definition, but he believes that it is almost impossible to make

⁴ *Sociology*, I, 550.

it.⁵ The fact is that simplicity, as he understands it, consists essentially in a certain crudity of organization. It is not easy to say with exactitude at what moment social organization is rudimentary enough to be called simple; this is a matter of evaluation. Also, the formula for it is so indeterminate that it fits all sorts of societies. "Our only course is to regard as a simple society, one which forms a single working whole unsubjected to any other, and of which the parts co-operate with or without a regulating centre, for certain public ends."⁶ Unfortunately, many peoples satisfy this condition. Thus he includes, somewhat at random, under this same rubric all societies that are civilized only to a small extent. Given this point of departure, the possibilities of all the rest of his classification can easily be imagined. In truly astonishing confusion most dissimilar societies are brought together: the Homeric Greeks are placed parallel with the holders of feudal estates in the tenth century, and below the Bechuanas, the Zulus, and the Fijians; the Athenian confederation is parallel to the feudal estates of thirteenth-century France, and below the Iroquois and the Araucanians.

The definite meaning of the term "simplicity" can be no other than that of a complete absence of parts. A simple society is, then, a society which does not include others more simple than itself, and which not only at present contains but a single segment but also presents no trace of previous segmentation. The "*horde*," as we have elsewhere defined it,⁷ corresponds exactly to this definition. It is a social aggregate which does not include, and has never included,

⁵ "We cannot in all cases say with precision what constitutes a simple society" (*ibid.*).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 551.

⁷ *Division du travail social*, p. 189.

within itself any other more elementary aggregate, but is directly composed of individuals. The latter do not form, within the total group, special groups differing from the whole; they are in atomic juxtaposition. Plainly a simpler society is impossible; the horde is thus the protoplasm of the social realm and, consequently, the natural basis of classification.

It is true, perhaps, that no historical society corresponds exactly to this description; but, as we have shown in the book cited above, we know many which are formed immediately and without intermediate groups by a combination of hordes. A horde which has thus become a social segment, instead of constituting an entire society, is called a clan; but it retains the same characteristic features. The clan is, indeed, a social aggregate which is not reducible to any other narrower one. It will, perhaps, be objected that the clan, where it is observed today, generally includes a number of families. But, first of all, we believe, for reasons we cannot develop here, that the formation of these small family groups is later than that of the clan; and further, they do not constitute social segments, in the proper sense of the term, because they are not political divisions. In all cases encountered, the clan constitutes the ultimate division of this genus. Consequently, even if no other facts substantiated the existence of the horde—and some such facts, which we shall one day have the opportunity to expound, are known to us—the existence of clans, that is, of societies formed by the compounding of hordes, authorizes us to suppose that there were at first simpler societies which may be reduced to the horde, properly so called. This would then make of the horde the seed from which all social species have developed.

Once this notion of the horde or single-segment society has been established—whether it be conceived as a historic reality or as a hypothesis of science—we have the support necessary for constructing the complete scale of social types. As many fundamental types will be distinguished as there are ways for the horde to combine and give birth to new societies and for the new societies to combine among themselves. We shall first meet aggregates formed simply by the combination of hordes or clans (to give them their new name) when they are in simple juxtaposition like the individuals of a horde. Examples of these, which one could term “simple polysegmental,” are found in certain Iroquois and Australian tribes. The Kabyle tribe has the same character: it is a union of clans organized in the form of villages. Very probably, there was a moment in history when the Roman *curia* and the Athenian phratry were societies of this kind. Above these would be placed the societies formed by a union of societies of the preceding species, that is, “polysegmental societies simply compounded.” Such is the character of the Iroquois confederation and of the confederation formed by the union of the Kabyle tribes. The same was true, at their origin, of each of the primitive tribes whose association later gave rise to the Roman city-state. We would then encounter the “polysegmental societies doubly compounded,” which result from the juxtaposition or fusion of several simply compounded polysegmented societies. Such is the city-state, an aggregate of tribes, which are themselves aggregates of *curiae*, which, in their turn, resolve themselves into gentes, or clans; and the Germanic tribe, with its counties, which are subdivided into hundreds, which, in their turn, have as the final unit the clan, which has become a village.

We need not develop these few indications further, since

our task is not here to carry out a classification of societies. It is too complex a problem to be treated adequately in the space at our disposal; it presupposes an accumulation of long and special researches. We only wished, by a few examples, to make our ideas clear and to show how this principle of method must be applied. We should not even consider the foregoing as constituting a complete classification of the lower societies. We have somewhat simplified the matter for the sake of greater clarity. We have assumed, for example, that each higher type was formed by a combination of identical societies, namely, the type immediately below. Now it is quite possible that societies of different kinds, situated at unequal levels on the genealogical tree of social types, should unite in a way to form a new species. We know at least one case of this; that is, the Roman Empire, which embraced peoples most diverse in nature.⁸

But these types once constituted, there will be occasion for distinguishing different varieties in each one of them according as the segmental societies, which serve to form the resultant society, maintain a certain individuality or are, on the contrary, absorbed in the total mass. It is clear, indeed, that social phenomena vary not only with the nature of the component elements of society but also with their mode of composition; they will especially be very different according to whether each of the subgroups keeps its local life or is drawn into the general life—in other words, according to their degree of concentration. Consequently, we shall have to investigate whether, at any moment, a complete coalescence of these segments is produced. We can recognize such coalescence by the fact that the original constitution of the

⁸ Nevertheless, it is probable that in general the distance between the component societies could not be very great; otherwise, there could be no cultural unity among them.

segment no longer affects its administrative and political organization. From this point of view the city-state is clearly distinct from the Germanic tribe. In the latter the organization, with clans as a basis, has maintained itself, although obscured toward the end of their history; while at Rome and Athens, the gentes and the *gêny* ceased very early to be political divisions and became private groups.

With the method thus outlined, it would be justifiable to introduce new distinctions on the basis of secondary morphological characteristics. However, for reasons that we shall give below, we believe it scarcely possible or useful to go beyond the general divisions just indicated. We need not enter into these details, however, but content ourselves with having formulated the principle of classification, which may be enunciated as follows: *We shall begin by classifying societies according to the degree of organization they present, taking as a basis the perfectly simple society or the society of one segment. Within these types we shall distinguish different varieties according to whether a complete coalescence of the initial segments does or does not appear.*

III

These rules answer implicitly a question the reader has perhaps put to himself as he has followed this discussion: How can we deal with social species as if there were such things without having directly established their existence? The answer is contained in the very method just described.

We have seen that societies are only different combinations of one and the same original society. Now the same element can combine only with others like it; and the compounds which result can, in their turn, combine only among themselves by following a limited number of combinations, especially when the compound elements are few, as is the

case with social segments. The gamut of possible combinations is therefore finite, and consequently most of them will necessarily appear repeatedly. We must therefore conclude that social species exist. Although the possibility remains that certain of these combinations are produced only once, this does not prevent its being a species. We shall simply say in cases of this kind that the species includes only one individual.*

There are social species, then, for the same reason that there are biological species. The latter are due to the fact that all organisms are merely varied combinations within one and the same anatomical unit. Nevertheless, there is, from this point of view, a greater difference between these two realms. In animals there is an exclusive trait which lends to their characteristics a fixity and permanence which is not found in the social species, namely, the capacity to reproduce. Because they are common to all members of a given species, the characteristics of animals are firmly rooted in the organism and are not readily modified by the action of the respective environments but persist uniformly in spite of the diversity of external circumstances. There is an internal force, heredity, that keeps them constant in spite of the external stimuli which oppose it. That is why they are clearly evident and can be determined with precision. In the social realm this internal force is lacking. As a rule, a second generation is a different species from the parent-societies because the latter, in combining, give birth to an entirely new organization. Only colonization can be compared to reproduction by germination; and in order that the type may persist, the colonial society must not mix with any other society of a different species or variety. The distinctive

* Is this not the case with the Roman Empire, which indeed appears to be without a parallel in history?

traits of the species do not then receive by heredity a reserve vitality which permits them to resist the pressure toward individual variation. They are modified in infinitely small gradations under the action of circumstances. Further, when we wish to discover the types by eliminating all variants, we often obtain only infinite forms. This indeterminateness increases naturally with the complexity of its characteristics. The more complex a thing is, the more numerous are the possible combinations from its parts. As a result the specific type does not present contours as definite as in biology except for the simplest and most general characteristics.¹⁰

¹⁰ When we edited this chapter for the first edition of this work, we said nothing of the method of classifying species according to their state of civilization. At that time classifications of that type, proposed by authoritative sociologists, did not exist, save perhaps the too evidently archaic one of Comte. Since that time, several attempts have been made in this direction, more particularly the one by Vierkandt ("Die Kulturtypen der Menschheit," in *Archiv. f. Anthropologie*, 1898), by Sutherland (*The Origin and Growth of the Moral Instinct*), and by Steinmetz ("Classification des types sociaux," in *Année sociologique*, III, 43-147). Nevertheless, we shall not pause to discuss them, for they do not answer the problem stated in this chapter. One finds classified there, not social species, but historical phases, which is quite different. Since its origin, France has passed through very different forms of civilization; it began by being agricultural, passed to craft industry and to small commerce, then to manufacturing, and finally to large-scale industry. Now, it is impossible to admit that the same collective individuality can change its species three or four times. A species must define itself by more constant characteristics. The economic state, technological state, etc., present phenomena too unstable and complex to furnish the basis of a classification. It is even very probable that the same industrial, scientific, and artistic civilization can be found in societies whose hereditary constitution is very different. Japan may in the future borrow our arts, our industry, even our political organization; it will not cease to belong to a different social species from France and Germany. Let us add that these attempts, although conducted by sociologists of worth, have given only vague, indecisive results of little utility.

CHAPTER V RULES FOR THE EXPLANATION OF SOCIAL FACTS

The establishment of species is, above all, a means of grouping facts in order to facilitate their interpretation. But social morphology is only an introduction to the truly explanatory part of the science. What is the proper method of this part?

I

Most sociologists think they have accounted for phenomena once they have shown how they are useful, what role they play, reasoning as if facts existed only from the point of view of this role and with no other determining cause than the sentiment, clear or confused, of the services they are called to render. That is why they think they have said all that is necessary, to render them intelligible, when they have established the reality of these services and have shown what social needs they satisfy.

Thus Comte traces the entire progressive force of the human species to this fundamental tendency "which directly impels man constantly to ameliorate his condition, whatever it may be, under all circumstances";¹ and Spencer relates this force to the need for greater happiness. It is in accordance with this principle that Spencer explains the formation of society by the alleged advantages which result from co-operation; the institution of government, by the utility of the regularization of military co-operation;² the transforma-

¹ *Cours de philosophie positive*, IV, 262.

² *Principles of Sociology*, II, 247.