

## SOCIOLOGY: ANIMAL OR RATIONAL?

VINCENT FITZGERALD, O.P.



HERE was a period in modern times when Sociology was related to science only because some branches of it pursued a scientific method of accumulating data. Today it is agreed that Sociology has assumed the nature of a true science both in its methods and in its aims. The latter gave it the greater claim to scientific status.

There are some who—with these we raise no issue at this time—would pile statistics upon the scale of true values and loudly proclaim that their particular type of Sociology outweighs everything else because it indicates the actual condition of humanity here and now. The numerical compilations and the recording of the conditions of the world's present population and the percentage or probability placed upon the future generations as shown by graphs and charts will never remove the cause of the present upheaval. Yet of what humanity is composed or whence it came and whither it is going is not of considerable weight in their estimation. Under the resulting ethos the nature of man is reduced to those manifestations which he possesses as a member of the animal kingdom and not those which make him the paragon of the whole of creation. Professor Raymond W. Murray, C.S.C., states: "We can study animals without much of a philosophy, but unless a basic philosophy which includes a knowledge of man's nature and immortal destiny guides us in the study of society we are studying man as an animal and not as a human being."<sup>1</sup>

In the relating of facts and causes we hold that a philosophy is necessary. This philosophy must be on an equal standing, at least, with the other branches of Sociology. To progress, Sociology must know what caused this or that social condition and what will work to prevent its recurrence. It is to be granted that facts must be gathered and field-work must be carried forward. But facts and momentary alleviation of conditions are not the ultimate of a science. Science must probe beyond the phenomena of poverty, crime, and mal-

<sup>1</sup> Murray, R. W., *Introductory Sociology*, p. 32.

adjustment and find out the causes. There must be a 'working hypothesis' or philosophy for rational action, and action must be rational if it is to be permanent. To quote Professor Murray again: "Even Lundberg admits that we can gather objective data only under a working hypothesis."<sup>2</sup>

Robert Maynard Hutchins, President of the University of Chicago, is quoted as follows: "We are in despair because the keys which were to open the gates of heaven have let us into a larger and more oppressive prison house. We think those keys were science and the free intelligence of man. They have failed us. We have long since cast off God. To what can we now appeal? The answer comes from the undiluted animalism of the last works of D. H. Lawrence, in the emotionalism of the demagogues, in Hitler's scream, 'We think with our blood.' Satisfied that we have weighed reason and found it wanting, we turn now to passion. Man attempts to cease to be a rational animal, and endeavors to become merely animal. In the attempt he is destined to be unsuccessful. It is his reason which tells him he is bewildered."

The philosophy of humanity is the philosophy of Aristotle. We today have this philosophy Christianized by St. Thomas of Aquin. In it, man is a creature composed of body and soul. He is not the end-result of economic pressure. Neither is he the mere subject of the facts of history. Nor is he just a biological specimen to be dwarfed by the mighty structure of the cosmos. Hobbes and Rousseau made man, if not anti-social, at least non-social. Leibnitz made the social nature of man a phase of the Divine Nature. In biological evolution, Darwin made man's social nature the continuation of the 'social' instincts of animals. Spencer in sociological evolution holds that man's nature is the projection of the animal impulses of the sub-human world. But Aristotle and Saint Thomas hailed man as a social animal, a fit subject for sociological study, the perfection of whose material, mental, and spiritual welfare is a worthy object for Sociology as a science.

The etymological derivation alone of the word *sociology* indicates this threefold objective. Under the aegis of the Aristotelian Theory and the Christianizing influence of Scholasticism it is given its full value. Professor Murray says: "In fact it is difficult to

---

<sup>2</sup> Lundberg, G. A., *Trends in American Sociology* (1929), 394-399.

<sup>3</sup> Hutchins, R. M., *The International Journal of Ethics*, XLIV (1934), January, 176.

see how there can be any complete sociology without its being impregnated with some underlying viewpoint or philosophy."<sup>4</sup>

Sociology working under the guidance of a true philosophy would raise itself above the mechanistic or purely material, and become intellectual and purposive in its nature and scope. Following a mechanistic theory, it is limited by quantity or matter. But a Sociology which is purposive transcends quantity or matter and its limits of time and space, and becomes intellectual. For purpose presupposes an intelligence, which is above the merely material. Now for Sociology to become purposive, it must know the nature of man and his destiny, what he is, where he is going. Man under this aspect is not a mere aggregation of molecular structures or a chemical composite, but a real entity endowed with intelligence and free-will. If only for beauty of the thought alone, this aspect of man's nature would be worthy of investigation.

Following Aristotle and St. Thomas, Sociology will investigate man and his relation to those about him, and with the aid of true philosophy will develop principles that are true today, tomorrow, and always. This, the approach to Truth, can be the only ultimate object of Sociology as a science. The truth is good, and the good is beautiful, and so along this pathway many can be lead to the One Who is goodness, truth, and beauty, and man's final end.

---

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 33.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Murray, Raymond W., C.S.C., *Introductory Sociology* (New York, 1935).  
Hutchins, Robert M., "The Issue in the Higher Learning" *The International Journal of Ethics*, XLIV (1934), January.