

THE ORIGIN OF SOCIETY

QUENTIN FRIEL, O.P.



SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS defines society as the moral grouping of men for a common purpose.¹ Immediately there arises the question, whence comes this society, this group.

Is man naturally a social animal, just as he is naturally a rational animal? Or did God, in creating the individual man, also create the group? Did men, naturally fierce, warlike and anti-social in the beginning, group together merely for protection as Hobbes asserts? Or has Rousseau the right of it when he says that man is naturally non-social, and in the beginning was non-intelligent and quietistic, resenting the presence of others of his kind, but was finally forced to organize the group to protect himself from the others? There are many other theories, among them the explanation that men came together for food and sex only; and another one, that human society is nothing but a continuation of the state in which man lived when he was purely animal.

Of all these theories, the first one, namely, that man is naturally a social animal, seems to be the most logical. The grouping into society is the result of the very nature and faculties of man. The same faculties which constitute man a rational and voluntary and human animal make him also a social being. This theory follows the best form of reasoning, for it proceeds from an analysis of things as they are, from the facts of experience, and is based on no fundamentally undemonstrable assumption. All the other opinions are based on a theoretical assumption which may or may not be true. Even if this assumption could be proved, which it cannot, it would not be valid material from which to draw such an important consequence, for in any kind of reasoning we should start out from something that is certainly true. Otherwise we shall have nothing save a series of conditional conclusions.

¹ *Adunatio hominum ad aliquid unum perficiendum.* Saint Thomas Aquinas, O.P.

Contra Impugnantes Dei Cultum et Religionem, Mandonnet Ed., p. 25.

Rousseau's assertion that man in the beginning was non-social and resented the society of other men is not demonstrable. Nor does it seem tenable in the light of experience. Indeed all the researches of the ethnologists seem to point out just the opposite. For wherever man has been found, he has been found living in a state of society. And wherever this state of sociability has been found, it has not given evidence of being *merely* for protection. Man was not forced into it solely by outside circumstances, such as the aggression of stronger men. In fact among all the races which have been discovered and investigated by scientists the people have in every case seemed to be living together because it was natural for them to do so. And this in spite of the quarrels which occur within even the best regulated groups. Granting that the proximate occasion of organized community life was the aggression of less quietistic men, it is still very erroneous to say that men gathered together solely as a means of defense against the strong. The ultimate cause of the social union must have been something more fundamental than defense against enemies.

Hobbes takes the other point of view and contends that all men were so fierce and warlike in the beginning that they were forced to band together in order to preserve their lives. But how they remained peaceful long enough to perfect their organization of defensive alliance, and why and how that organization remains till today, this theory of extrinsic pressure does not explain. There seems to be a fundamental discrepancy in the assertion that men of such fierce and bellicose tendencies managed to stay together, banded against other men of the same disposition, without the struggling union degenerating into an indiscriminate *melée*. Against this theory may be urged the fact that all men are not intrinsically bellicose; on the contrary most men are rather peaceful, at least under ordinary circumstances. Thus both these theories of society solely as a defense organization—and this in spite of the assumed non-social and anti-social nature of man—seem false in the light of facts as they are.

Anyone who thinks that the society of men is merely a development of the union of brutes that men once were, overlooks some very fundamental and radical differences in the two societies, animal and human. The animal society is always the same, at least within the species of animals which form it. Bees always have the same system and ruler; the union of the great apes and the herding of the elephants undergo no changes, save perhaps in the loss of one monarch and the accession of another who rules just as did his predecessor.

And in all these groups there are three things sought and three only : Food, Sex, and Protection.

With human society it is vastly different. The makeup of human groupings has been constantly shifting since the first man was given his wife. All forms have been tried and all are in use today, from the abject communism of the Russian Soviet up to the absolute monarchy of the Roman Church. There is no evolution within the species in the groupings of the brute herd. It is likewise true that all men are specifically alike. If, therefore, human society were but a development of the animal herd, it should follow that all human society is alike. That such a conclusion is false need scarcely be stated. Therefore the premise. Who looks may see. All these different forms of human society, and that society which is above all others, the human group, have evolved to meet and suit the peculiar needs springing from the very nature of mankind. True, all societies help man in the attainment of his three animal needs, food, sex and protection. However, these three factors are not the only reasons for man's grouping into society. Man's nature transcends these primal instincts which he has in common with brute creation and seeks other and far more important things in the society of his fellows. He seeks these latter because his very nature demands them, and this can be shown through an analysis of the powers and faculties with which God endowed the first man. These interior faculties, inherent in the soul and being of every man, constitute him as a social animal. There is no need to go outside man; there is no necessity for postulating external factors when the answer to the question lies within man himself.

As far back as history records and tradition relates man has always been found in the same state in which he exists today. He has always had the same nature; the same soul; the same needs, aspirations and ambitions. He has always been rational and voluntary, seeking the good and true, not as the animal does, but as his intellect and will direct him to it. It is from an analysis of these two faculties, the intellect and the will, that we shall find the fundamental reason for the social organization. His nature itself, acting in accordance with the Divine endowment of that nature, is the efficient cause of Society. "*Acting in accordance with the Divine endowment of that nature,*" for above all else God is the first efficient cause of society, since He, and He alone, caused man.

The intellect of man seeks truth. Everyone admits that. His will seeks good and happiness. That too is indisputable. The attainment of knowledge and truth, the pursuit of the good and of happi-

ness make up the whole course of a man's life. Now the intellect of man is just limited enough so that alone he cannot attain all the truth which that faculty craves, and which he needs in order to be happy. The proof of this lies in the errors into which the race of men has lapsed when alone and individually each one sought privately the truth. The false systems of philosophy, the various aberrations disguised under the name of science, the erroneous views of life can all be attributed in some measure to the fact that men sought the answer to the riddle all alone, and consequently fell into error.

Not only do the depths and accuracy of intellectual pursuits demand the society of other men, but also the breadth of science demands that men collaborate in the pursuit of knowledge. The progress of the experimental physical sciences alone gives proof of that. For hundreds and thousands of years men have been investigating the secrets of nature. The data already collected is now vast in content, but who can say that the end is yet reached. This is only one field of knowledge. It was impossible for one man to do all the empirical work even in this one small field. So when we consider the much wider expanse of possible knowledge it is inconceivable that one man, alone and unaided, could attain the sum of science that is required to fulfill man's ardent desire to know the *what*, the *why* and the *wherefore* of all things that are knowable. The first men, almost with the first intellectual act, must have realized this, and accordingly banded together to pool their knowledge and share the fruits thereof with one another. No chance meetings would suffice; the acquisition and distribution of truth demanded constant association so that the knowledge garnered by each individual through internal and external experience might be constantly interchanged, and thus add to the sum of each man's science.

The will too demands the constant companionship and society of men in order that it may attain its object. Since the will is a rational appetite, and all appetites seek good, so the will has for its object, the good.² The first good of all is God, and He is the first object of the will. History shows that men, in striving to unite their wills to the

² "I answer that the will is a rational appetite. Now every appetite is only of something good. The reason of this is that the appetite is nothing else than an inclination of a person desirous of a thing towards that thing. Now every inclination is to something like and suitable to the thing inclined. Since, therefore, everything, inasmuch as it is being and substance, is a good, it must needs be that every inclination is to something good. And hence it is that the Philosopher says (*Ethic. i*) that *the good is that which all desire.*" *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 8, a. 3.

Divine Good, have often erred when seeking to do this alone and unaided. While the will naturally tends towards the greatest good which is God, yet it is often led to follow apparent goods which are disruptive of the union which should be maintained between the human will and its final end, God. Consequently, in order to attain fully the object of his will man needs the assistance of other men. He needs teachers, instructors and priests. He must have aid, assistance and inspiration in performing those moral duties which are necessary to attain his final beatitude, his supreme good. All this is but another way of saying that from the nature and object of the will it can be shown that man is naturally a social animal, needing the help and companionship of his kind so that he may reach the object of all striving which is God.

Not only does the will seek its own object but it also moves the intellect to seek that truth which is the object of the intellect; it moves and ordains the lower faculties of man to those goods which fulfill the legitimate cravings of those faculties. In fact it may be said that the adequate good of the will is the good of the whole man and all his faculties. So, just as it was necessary for the progress of knowledge that men live, work and think together, so human society and aid is required for the attainment of that good and happiness which human nature craves. Man has for his end happiness, and this he can attain fully only inasmuch as all his faculties fulfill their operations and possess those goods to which they are ordered. Alone and unaided he cannot bring his nature to its fullest perfection, which is rest in good possessed. He needs the association, personal or by hearsay and relation, of the whole human race.

What is good for the moral development of one, is good for the moral progress of all, for all men are fundamentally and specifically alike in their pleasures and sorrows. Without society how could man know and delight in the beauties and secrets of nature, in the esthetic pleasure of poetry and song and all the other arts? Each man has had from the beginning his special contribution to make to the welfare and happiness of other men. The other men in their turn have needed this contribution to their welfare and happiness in order that they might reach to the fullest extent possible the objects of their intellect, their will, their lower faculties, their whole being.

As it is true of the perfection of the intellect so it is true of the perfection of the appetitive faculties that men must live together, share their pleasures, collaborate in their findings, so that the sum of all may be the sum of each. This collaboration, association and inter-

course, so necessary to the very nature of man, proclaims the natural need for society and man's innate tendency to be social. For the desires of nature are not in vain, and it is the universal desire of every man that he may know the truth and have the good. Consequently, he must needs be a social being. He did not become social by reason of the pressure of extrinsic circumstances. He is sociable because his very nature demands society. Wherever man is, there will he be found social, with a sociability which springs from that nature which makes him a man, and not a brute.

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