

# THE PRINCIPLES OF SOCIOLOGY

BY  
HERBERT SPENCER

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

VOL. I

NEW YORK  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1898

1491

PART II.

THE INDUCTIONS OF SOCIOLOGY.

## CHAPTER I.

### WHAT IS A SOCIETY ?

§ 212. This question has to be asked and answered at the outset. Until we have decided whether or not to regard a society as an entity; and until we have decided whether, if regarded as an entity, a society is to be classed as absolutely unlike all other entities or as like some others; our conception of the subject-matter before us remains vague.

It may be said that a society is but a collective name for a number of individuals. Carrying the controversy between nominalism and realism into another sphere, a nominalist might affirm that just as there exist only the members of a species, while the species considered apart from them has no existence; so the units of a society alone exist, while the existence of the society is but verbal. Instancing a lecturer's audience as an aggregate which by disappearing at the close of the lecture, proves itself to be not a thing but only a certain arrangement of persons, he might argue that the like holds of the citizens forming a nation.

But without disputing the other steps of his argument, the last step may be denied. The arrangement, temporary in the one case, is permanent in the other; and it is the permanence of the relations among component parts which constitutes the individuality of a whole as distinguished from the individualities of its parts. A mass broken into fragments ceases to be a thing; while, conversely, the stones,

bricks, and wood, previously separate, become the thing called a house if connected in fixed ways.

Thus we consistently regard a society as an entity, because, though formed of discrete units, a certain concreteness in the aggregate of them is implied by the general persistence of the arrangements among them throughout the area occupied. And it is this trait which yields our idea of a society. For, withholding the name from an ever-changing cluster such as primitive men form, we apply it only where some constancy in the distribution of parts has resulted from settled life.

§ 213. But now, regarding a society as a thing, what kind of thing must we call it? It seems totally unlike every object with which our senses acquaint us. Any likeness it may possibly have to other objects, cannot be manifest to perception, but can be discerned only by reason. If the constant relations among its parts make it an entity; the question arises whether these constant relations among its parts are akin to the constant relations among the parts of other entities. Between a society and anything else, the only conceivable resemblance must be one due to *parallelism of principle in the arrangement of components*.

There are two great classes of aggregates with which the social aggregate may be compared—the inorganic and the organic. Are the attributes of a society in any way like those of a not-living body? or are they in any way like those of a living body? or are they entirely unlike those of both?

The first of these questions needs only to be asked to be answered in the negative. A whole of which the parts are alive, cannot, in its general characters, be like lifeless wholes. The second question, not to be thus promptly answered, is to be answered in the affirmative. The reasons for asserting that the permanent relations among the parts of a society, are analogous to the permanent relations among the parts of a living body, we have now to consider.

## CHAPTER II.

### A SOCIETY IS AN ORGANISM.

§ 214. When we say that growth is common to social aggregates and organic aggregates, we do not thus entirely exclude community with inorganic aggregates. Some of these, as crystals, grow in a visible manner; and all of them, on the hypothesis of evolution, have arisen by integration at some time or other. Nevertheless, compared with things we call inanimate, living bodies and societies so conspicuously exhibit augmentation of mass, that we may fairly regard this as characterizing them both. Many organisms grow throughout their lives; and the rest grow throughout considerable parts of their lives. Social growth usually continues either up to times when the societies divide, or up to times when they are overwhelmed.

Here, then, is the first trait by which societies ally themselves with the organic world and substantially distinguish themselves from the inorganic world.

§ 215. It is also a character of social bodies, as of living bodies, that while they increase in size they increase in structure. Like a low animal, the embryo of a high one has few distinguishable parts; but while it is acquiring greater mass, its parts multiply and differentiate. It is thus with a society. At first the unlikenesses among its groups of units are inconspicuous in number and degree; but as population

augmentations, divisions and sub-divisions become more numerous and more decided. Further, in the social organism as in the individual organism, differentiations cease only with that completion of the type which marks maturity and precedes decay.

Though in inorganic aggregates also, as in the entire Solar System and in each of its members, structural differentiations accompany the integrations; yet these are so relatively slow, and so relatively simple, that they may be disregarded. The multiplication of contrasted parts in bodies politic and in living bodies, is so great that it substantially constitutes another common character which marks them off from inorganic bodies.

§ 216. This community will be more fully appreciated on observing that progressive differentiation of structures is accompanied by progressive differentiation of functions.

The divisions, primary, secondary, and tertiary, which arise in a developing animal, do not assume their major and minor unlikenesses to no purpose. Along with diversities in their shapes and compositions go diversities in the actions they perform: they grow into unlike organs having unlike duties. Assuming the entire function of absorbing nutriment at the same time that it takes on its structural characters, the alimentary system becomes gradually marked off into contrasted portions; each of which has a special function forming part of the general function. A limb, instrumental to locomotion or prehension, acquires divisions and sub-divisions which perform their leading and their subsidiary shares in this office.

So is it with the parts into which a society divides. A dominant class arising does not simply become unlike the rest, but assumes control over the rest; and when this class separates into the more and the less dominant, these, again, begin to discharge distinct parts of the entire control. With the classes whose actions are controlled it is the same. The various groups into which they

fall have various occupations: each of such groups also, within itself, acquiring minor contrasts of parts along with minor contrasts of duties.

And here we see more clearly how the two classes of things we are comparing, distinguish themselves from things of other classes; for such differences of structure as slowly arise in inorganic aggregates, are not accompanied by what we can fairly call differences of function.

§ 271. Why in a body politic and in a living body, these unlike actions of unlike parts are properly regarded by us as functions, while we cannot so regard the unlike actions of unlike parts in an inorganic body, we shall perceive on turning to the next and most distinctive common trait.

Evolution establishes in them both, not differences simply, but definitely-connected differences—differences such that each makes the others possible. The parts of an inorganic aggregate are so related that one may change greatly without appreciably affecting the rest. It is otherwise with the parts of an organic aggregate or of a social aggregate. In either of these, the changes in the parts are mutually determined, and the changed actions of the parts are mutually dependent. In both, too, this mutuality increases as the evolution advances. The lowest type of animal is all stomach, all respiratory surface, all limb. Development of a type having appendages by which to move about or lay hold of food, can take place only if these appendages, losing power to absorb nutriment directly from surrounding bodies, are supplied with nutriment by parts which retain the power of absorption. A respiratory surface to which the circulating fluids are brought to be aerated, can be formed only on condition that the concomitant loss of ability to supply itself with materials for repair and growth, is made good by the development of a structure bringing these materials. Similarly in a society. What we call with perfect propriety its organization, necessarily implies traits of the same kind.

While rudimentary, a society is all warrior, all hunter, all hut-builder, all tool-maker: every part fulfils for itself all needs. Progress to a stage characterized by a permanent army, can go on only as there arise arrangements for supplying that army with food, clothes, and munitions of war by the rest. If here the population occupies itself solely with agriculture and there with mining—if these manufacture goods while those distribute them, it must be on condition that in exchange for a special kind of service rendered by each part to other parts, these other parts severally give due proportions of their services.

This division of labour, first dwelt on by political economists as a social phenomenon, and thereupon recognized by biologists as a phenomenon of living bodies, which they called the "physiological division of labour," is that which in the society, as in the animal, makes it a living whole. Scarcely can I emphasize enough the truth that in respect of this fundamental trait, a social organism and an individual organism are entirely alike. When we see that in a mammal, arresting the lungs quickly brings the heart to a stand; that if the stomach fails absolutely in its office all other parts by-and-by cease to act; that paralysis of its limbs entails on the body at large death from want of food, or inability to escape; that loss of even such small organs as the eyes, deprives the rest of a service essential to their preservation; we cannot but admit that mutual dependence of parts is an essential characteristic. And when, in a society, we see that the workers in iron stop if the miners do not supply materials; that makers of clothes cannot carry on their business in the absence of those who spin and weave textile fabrics; that the manufacturing community will cease to act unless the food-producing and food-distributing agencies are acting; that the controlling powers, governments, bureaux, judicial officers, police, must fail to keep order when the necessaries of life are not supplied to them by the parts kept in order; we are obliged to say that this



mutual dependence of parts is similarly rigorous. Unlike as the two kinds of aggregates otherwise are, they are unlike in respect of this fundamental character, and the characters implied by it.

§ 218. How the combined actions of mutually-dependent parts constitute life of the whole, and how there hence results a parallelism between social life and animal life, we see still more clearly on learning that the life of every visible organism is constituted by the lives of units too minute to be seen by the unaided eye.

An undeniable illustration is furnished by the strange order *Myxomycetes*. The spores or germs produced by one of these forms, become ciliated monads, which, after a time of active locomotion, change into shapes like those of amœbæ, move about, take in nutriment, grow, multiply by fission. Then these amœba-form individuals swarm together, begin to coalesce into groups, and these groups to coalesce with one another: making a mass sometimes barely visible, sometimes as big as the hand. This *plasmodium*, irregular, mostly reticulated, and in substance gelatinous, itself exhibits movements of its parts like those of a gigantic rhizopod, creeping slowly over surfaces of decaying matters, and even up the stems of plants. Here, then, union of many minute living individuals to form a relatively vast aggregate in which their individualities are apparently lost, but the life of which results from combination of their lives, is demonstrable.

In other cases, instead of units which, originally discrete, lose their individualities by aggregation, we have units which, arising by multiplication from the same germ, do not part company, but nevertheless display their separate lives very clearly. A growing sponge has its horny fibres clothed with a gelatinous substance; and the microscope shows this to consist of moving monads. We cannot deny life to the sponge as a whole, for it shows us some corporate

actions. The outer amœba-form units partially lose their individualities by fusion into a protective layer or skin; the supporting framework of fibres is produced by the joint agency of the monads; and from their joint agency also result those currents of water which are drawn in through the smaller orifices and expelled through the larger. But while there is thus shown a feeble aggregate life, the lives of the myriads of component units are very little subordinated: these units form, as it were, a nation having scarcely any sub-division of functions. Or, in the words of Professor Huxley, "the sponge represents a kind of subaqueous city, where the people are arranged about the streets and roads, in such a manner, that each can easily appropriate his food from the water as it passes along." Again, in the hydroid polype *Myriothela*, "pseudopodial processes are being constantly projected from the walls of the alimentary canal into its cavity;" and these Dr. Allman regards as processes from the cells forming the walls, which lay hold of alimentary matter just as those of an amœba do. The like may be seen in certain planarian worms.

Even in the highest animals there remains traceable this relation between the aggregate life and the lives of components. Blood is a liquid in which, along with nutritive matters, circulate innumerable living units—the blood corpuscles. These have severally their life-histories. During its first stage each of them, then known as a white corpuscle, makes independent movements like those of an amœba; it "may be fed with coloured food, which will then be seen to have accumulated in the interior;" "and in some cases the colourless blood-corpuscles have actually been seen to devour their more diminutive companions, the red ones." Nor is this individual life of the units provable only where flotation in a liquid allows its signs to be readily seen. Sundry mucous surfaces, as those of the air passages, are covered with what is called ciliated epithelium—a layer of minute elongated cells packed side by side, and

each bearing on its exposed end several cilia continually in motion. The wavings of these cilia are essentially like those of the monads which live in the passages running through a sponge; and just as the joint action of these ciliated sponge-monads propels the current of water, so does the joint action of the ciliated epithelium-cells move forward the mucous secretion covering them. If there needs further proof that these epithelium-cells have independent lives, we have it in the fact that when detached and placed in a fit menstruum, they "move about with considerable rapidity for some time, by the continued vibrations of the cilia with which they are furnished."

On thus seeing that an ordinary living organism may be regarded as a nation of units which live individually, and have many of them considerable degrees of independence, we shall have the less difficulty in regarding a nation of human beings as an organism.

§ 219. The relation between the lives of the units and the life of the aggregate, has a further character common to the two cases. By a catastrophe the life of the aggregate may be destroyed without immediately destroying the lives of all its units; while, on the other hand, if no catastrophe abridges it, the life of the aggregate is far longer than the lives of its units.

In a cold-blooded animal, ciliated cells perform their motions with perfect regularity long after the creature they are part of has become motionless. Muscular fibres retain their power of contracting under stimulation. The cells of secreting organs go on pouring out their product if blood is artificially supplied to them. And the components of an entire organ, as the heart, continue their co-operation for many hours after its detachment.

Similarly, arrest of those commercial activities, governmental co-ordinations, etc., which constitute the corporate life of a nation, may be caused, say by an inroad of barbarians, without immediately

stopping the actions of all the units. Certain classes of these, especially the widely-diffused ones engaged in food-production, may long survive and carry on their individual occupations.

On the other hand, the minute living elements composing a developed animal, severally evolve, play their parts, decay, and are replaced, while the animal as a whole continues. In the deep layer of the skin, cells are formed by fission which, as they enlarge, are thrust outwards, and, becoming flattened to form the epidermis, eventually exfoliate, while the younger ones beneath take their places. Liver-cells, growing by imbibition of matters from which they separate the bile, presently die, and their vacant seats are occupied by another generation. Even bone, though so dense and seemingly inert, is permeated by blood-vessels carrying materials to replace old components by new ones. And the replacement, rapid in some tissues and in others slow, goes on at such rate that during the continued existence of the entire body, each portion of it has been many times over produced and destroyed.

Thus it is also with a society and its units. Integrity of the whole as of each large division is perennially maintained, notwithstanding the deaths of component citizens. The fabric of living persons which, in a manufacturing town, produces some commodity for national use, remains after a century as large a fabric, though all the masters and workers who a century ago composed it have long since disappeared. Even with minor parts of this industrial structure the like holds. A firm that dates from past generations, still carrying on business in the name of its founder, has had all its members and *employés* changed one by one, perhaps several times over; while the firm has continued to occupy the same place and to maintain like relations with buyers and sellers. Throughout we find this. Governing bodies, general and local, ecclesiastical corporations, armies, institutions of all orders down to guilds, clubs, philanthropic associations, etc.,

show us a continuity of life exceeding that of the persons constituting them. Nay, more. As part of the same law, we see that the existence of the society at large exceeds in duration that of some of these compound parts. Private unions, local public bodies, secondary national institutions, towns, carrying on special industries, may decay, while the nation, maintaining its integrity, evolves in mass and structure.

In both cases, too, the mutually-dependent functions of the various divisions, being severally made up of the actions of many units, it results that these units dying one by one, are replaced without the function in which they share being sensibly affected. In a muscle, each sarcois element wearing out in its turn, is removed and a substitution made while the rest carry on their combined contractions as usual; and the retirement of a public official or death of a shopman, perturbs inappreciably the business of the department, or activity of the industry, in which he had a share.

Hence arises in the social organism, as in the individual organism, a life of the whole quite unlike the lives of the units; though it is a life produced by them.

§ 220. From these likenesses between the social organism and the individual organism, we must now turn to an extreme unlikeness. The parts of an animal form a concrete whole; but the parts of a society form a whole which is discrete. While the living units composing the one are bound together in close contact, the living units composing the other are free, are not in contact, and are more or less widely dispersed. How, then, can there be any parallelism?

Though this difference is fundamental and apparently puts comparison out of the question, yet examination proves it to be less than it seems. Presently I shall have to point out that complete admission of it consists with maintenance of the alleged analogy; but we will first observe how one who thought it needful, might argue that even in this respect there is a smaller contrast than a cursory glance shows.

He might urge that the physically-coherent body of an animal is not composed all through of living units; but that it consists in large measure of differentiated parts which the vitally active parts have formed, and which thereafter become semi-vital and in some cases un-vital. Taking as an example the protoplasmic layer underlying the skin, he might say that while this consists of truly living units, the cells produced in it, changing into epithelium scales, become inert protective structures; and pointing to the insensitive nails, hair, horns, etc., arising from this layer, he might show that such parts, though components of the organism, are hardly living components. Carrying out the argument, he would contend that elsewhere in the body there exist such protoplasmic layers, from which grow the tissues composing the various organs—layers which alone remain fully alive, while the structures evolved from them lose their vitality in proportion as they are specialized: instancing cartilage, tendon, and connective tissue, as showing this in conspicuous ways. From all which he would draw the inference that though the body forms a coherent whole, its essential units, taken by themselves, form a whole which is coherent only throughout the protoplasmic layers.

And then would follow the facts showing that the social organism, rightly conceived, is much less discontinuous than it seems. He would contend that as, in the individual organism, we include with the fully living parts, the less living and not living parts which co-operate in the total activities; so, in the social organism, we must include not only those most highly vitalized units, the human beings, who chiefly determine its phenomena, but also the various kinds of domestic animals, lower in the scale of life, which, under the control of man, co-operate with him, and even those far inferior structures, the plants, which, propagated by human agency, supply materials for animal and human activities. In defence of this view he would point out how largely these lower classes of organisms, co-existing

with men in societies, affect the structures and activities of the societies—how the traits of the pastoral type depend on the natures of the creatures reared; and how in settled societies the plants producing food, materials for textile fabrics, etc., determine certain kinds of social arrangements and actions. After which he might insist that since the physical characters, mental natures, and daily doings, of the human units, are, in part, moulded by relations to these animals and vegetals, which, living by their aid and aiding them to live, enter so much into social life as even to be cared for by legislation, these lower forms cannot rightly be excluded from the conception of the social organism. Hence would come his conclusion that when, with human beings, are incorporated the less vitalized beings, animal and vegetal, covering the surface occupied by the society, there results an aggregate having a continuity of parts more nearly approaching to that of an individual organism; and which is also like it in being composed of local aggregations of highly vitalized units, imbedded in a vast aggregation of units of various lower degrees of vitality, which are, in a sense, produced by, modified by, and arranged by, the higher units.

But without accepting this view, and admitting that the discreteness of the social organism stands in marked contrast with the concreteness of the individual organism, the objection may still be adequately met.

§ 221. Though coherence among its parts is a prerequisite to that co-operation by which the life of an individual organism is carried on; and though the members of a social organism, not forming a concrete whole, cannot maintain co-operation by means of physical influences directly propagated from part to part; yet they can and do maintain co-operation by another agency. Not in contact, they nevertheless affect one another through intervening spaces, both by emotional language and by the language, oral

and written, of the intellect. For carrying on mutually-dependent actions, it is requisite that impulses, adjusted in their kinds, amounts, and times, shall be conveyed from part to part. This requisite is fulfilled in living bodies by molecular waves, that are indefinitely diffused in low types, and in high types are carried along definite channels (the function of which has been significantly called *inter-nuncial*). It is fulfilled in societies by the signs of feelings and thoughts, conveyed from person to person; at first in vague ways and only through short distances, but afterwards more definitely and through greater distances. That is to say, the inter-nuncial function, not achievable by stimuli physically transferred, is nevertheless achieved by language—emotional and intellectual.

That mutual dependence of parts which constitutes organization is thus effectually established. Though discrete instead of concrete, the social aggregate is rendered a living whole.

§ 222. But now, on pursuing the course of thought opened by this objection and the answer to it, we arrive at an implied contrast of great significance—a contrast fundamentally affecting our idea of the ends to be achieved by social life.

Though the discreteness of a social organism does not prevent sub-division of functions and mutual dependence of parts, yet it does prevent that differentiation by which one part becomes an organ of feeling and thought, while other parts become insensitive. High animals of whatever class are distinguished from low ones by complex and well-integrated nervous systems. While in inferior types the minute scattered ganglia may be said to exist for the benefit of other structures, the concentrated ganglia in superior types are the structures for the benefit of which the rest may be said to exist. Though a developed nervous system so directs the actions of the whole body as to preserve its integrity; yet



the welfare of the nervous system is the ultimate object of all these actions: damage to any other organ being serious in proportion as it immediately or remotely entails that pain or loss of pleasure which the nervous system suffers. But the discreteness of a society negatives differentiations carried to this extreme. In an individual organism the minute living units, most of them permanently localized, growing up, working, reproducing, and dying away in their respective places, are in successive generations moulded to their respective functions; so that some become specially sentient and others entirely insentient. But it is otherwise in a social organism. The units of this, out of contact and much less rigidly held in their relative positions, cannot be so much differentiated as to become feelingless units and units which monopolize feeling.

There are, indeed, traces of such a differentiation. Human beings are unlike in the amounts of sensation and emotion producible in them by like causes: here callousness, here susceptibility, is a characteristic. The mechanically-working and hard-living units are less sensitive than the mentally-working and more protected units. But while the regulative structures of the social organism tend, like those of the individual organism, to become specialized as seats of feeling, the tendency is checked by want of that physical cohesion which brings fixity of function; and it is also checked by the continued need for feeling in the mechanically-working units for the due discharge of their functions.

Hence, then, a cardinal difference in the two kinds of organisms. In the one, consciousness is concentrated in a small part of the aggregate. In the other, it is diffused throughout the aggregate: all the units possess the capacities for happiness and misery, if not in equal degrees, still in degrees that approximate. As, then, there is no social sensorium, the welfare of the aggregate, considered apart from that of the units, is not an end to be sought. The society exists for the benefit of its members; not its mem-

bers for the benefit of the society. It has ever to be remembered that great as may be the efforts made for the prosperity of the body politic, yet the claims of the body politic are nothing in themselves, and become something only in so far as they embody the claims of its component individuals.

§ 223. From this last consideration, which is a digression rather than a part of the argument, let us now return and sum up the reasons for regarding a society as an organism.

It undergoes continuous growth. As it grows, its parts become unlike: it exhibits increase of structure. The unlike parts simultaneously assume activities of unlike kinds. These activities are not simply different, but their differences are so related as to make one another possible. The reciprocal aid thus given causes mutual dependence of the parts. And the mutually-dependent parts, living by and for one another, form an aggregate constituted on the same general principle as is an individual organism. The analogy of a society to an organism becomes still clearer on learning that every organism of appreciable size is a society; and on further learning that in both, the lives of the units continue for some time if the life of the aggregate is suddenly arrested, while if the aggregate is not destroyed by violence, its life greatly exceeds in duration the lives of its units. Though the two are contrasted as respectively discrete and concrete, and though there results a difference in the ends subserved by the organization, there does not result a difference in the laws of the organization: the required mutual influences of the parts, not transmissible in a direct way, being, in a society, transmitted in an indirect way.

Having thus considered in their most general forms the reasons for regarding a society as an organism, we are prepared for following out the comparison in detail.