

THE  
STUDY OF SOCIETY  
METHODS AND PROBLEMS

*Edited by*

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## PREFACE

There is to-day widespread recognition of the fact that the future of human civilization depends to a high degree upon Man's capacity to understand the forces and factors which control his own behaviour. Such understanding must be achieved, not only as regards individual conduct, but equally as regards the mass phenomena resulting from group contacts, which are becoming increasingly intimate and influential. Everyone pays lip-service to the vital necessity for a vigorous development of 'social science'. Yet when ardent investigators, not satisfied by general exhortation and advice, ask, "What shall we do?" and "How shall we do it?", few serious attempts are made to answer them. This lack of detailed guidance is perhaps least marked in economics and in the field of vital statistics; it is certainly most marked in the specifically human sciences of psychology, social anthropology, and sociology. Nowhere have these three sciences been properly mobilized to deal with the social problems which yearly grow more pressing.

In the summer of 1935 three members of the group responsible for this book met at Cambridge to discuss informally what steps could be taken to direct the application of the more reliable methods of psychology, anthropology, and sociology to a study of the problems of complex societies. Many plans were considered. Eventually it was decided to attempt to bring together a small number of psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists who were known to be actively interested in the social implications of their respective fields of work.

It must be stated that no effort was made, then or later, to organize a large or completely representative group. The view adopted was that if genuine progress is to be achieved, free, frank, and exhaustive discussion and criticism are essential. Such a method can be adequately exploited only in a group small in numbers, all the members of which are closely interested in or engaged upon research in one of the branches of knowledge concerned.

The plan found a ready and eager response. A preliminary meeting was held in November, 1935, and the group has met for

discussion twice a year since. From the beginning it was agreed that the first and most urgent need was for a survey of existing methods, contributions, and problems, which might help prospective laboratory and field workers in complex societies in much the same way as *Notes and Queries on Anthropology*, first published by the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1874, had assisted the field worker in anthropology. This was the idea which inspired the preparation of the present book.

The volume is addressed mainly to those who are engaged upon, or who wish to engage upon, social research, and who require to know what methods are already available, upon what established conclusions they may reasonably build, and what are some of the outstanding problems which might immediately repay further study. The employment of many of the methods described obviously demands specialized training. At the same time it is recognized that invaluable services can be rendered by persons who have had little opportunity to obtain technical instruction, and at various points in the book attempts have been made to indicate how the amateur investigator can best assist in the development of social studies.

Each chapter was first written by the group member whose name appears at its head. It was then duplicated and sent to all the other group members, so that it could be criticized and discussed at the next meeting of the group.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the bulk of the contributions have been considered, revised, re-considered, and revised again, sometimes being redrafted three or four times. The criticism has been free and often drastic, but mainly constructive. Every member of the group has played a part in this discussion, and the volume is thus, in a literal sense, a co-operative product. While it would be too much to say that each statement made and each proposal put forward would receive the unqualified assent of the whole group membership, the contributions in their final form represent views concerning which a very substantial amount of agreement has been achieved. It is not infrequently said that when psychologists, anthropologists, or sociologists meet, little but disagreement emerges. This book may be regarded as a practical rebuttal of such a charge.

<sup>1</sup> Only in the case of Chapter IV was this procedure not adopted. For personal reasons Dr. Collins was unable to complete her contribution in time for duplication and group discussion.

An initial draft of the chapter on methods of assessing temperament was made by Dr. R. B. Cattell. Shortly afterwards, Dr. Cattell left this country to undertake work in America, and since it has been a principle of group procedure that alterations to contributions should be discussed directly between the author and the other group members, it was necessary to find another writer who could take over the task which Dr. Cattell had begun.

Any book of this kind must be highly selective. Not all methods and problems can be discussed, and only a few topics can be treated under each heading. It is therefore inevitable that the volume should appear to be somewhat discontinuous in parts and to suffer from certain striking omissions. The absence of any more than passing reference to the methods and problems of economics must not be held to imply a failure to recognize the important part played by economic factors and motives in human social behaviour. The group considered, however, that the social applications of economics had already been more widely discussed than those of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. We have also made no effort to describe fully the contributions which can be made by medicine or, indeed, any of the biological sciences other than the three chosen.

The group decided to confine its attention mainly to practical and methodological questions, and, with a few exceptions, fundamental general theories have not been mentioned or critically weighed. In particular, within the sphere of social psychology proper, we have not attempted to present or to evaluate the historical development of social theories which has taken place throughout the last 200 years, since David Hume brilliantly foresaw a "science of man" which "will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility, to any other of human comprehension". Hence no adequate account has been given of the work of the psychologists and sociologists who have expounded social theory. It is true that the relatively specific, detailed, and controlled methods of research with which this book is mainly concerned all demand a theoretical basis and justification, and that many of them have developed as a direct result of suggestions and conclusions presented in earlier and contemporary theoretical discussion. But to have attempted a reasonably complete historical survey would have carried the book beyond all convenient limits of size.

The greater part of the editorial work involved in the production

of this volume has been done by Dr. Lindgren, who has been particularly assisted by Professor Bartlett, Dr. Thouless, and Professor Ginsberg. The index has been compiled by Dr. Pickford. Dr. Vernon has undertaken the arrangements for the group meetings and has throughout acted as general secretary. Miss Esther Vernon-Jones has been responsible for the extremely important and difficult task of typing and circulating the majority of the contributions, as well as helping to check and complete references.

The first aim which the group has set itself is achieved ; there are many others. More specialized surveys are needed, and will be attempted. It is hoped to initiate, to aid in organizing and, if the opportunity offers, to carry out research upon many of the topics considered in the present volume, and upon others as well. The group as a whole, or any member of it, will be glad to receive and consider suggestions from intending field workers, trained or untrained, or from laboratory investigators, and in every possible way to assist in directing the rapidly growing world interest in the scientific study of society.

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