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their pinewood fields
and bad clay knobs, that
they might migrate to
Brazil.

De Sorocaba a S. Paulo, em bon
co de mula, viajando de um dia
das. (p. 150)

"Santos is destined to be one of
the finest cities of the Empire, being
the port of an extensive fertile
region, soon to be populated by
an ~~intelligent~~ industrious, intel-
ligent people, from the Southern
States of North America." (153)

William Graham Sumner's Conception
of Society

An Interpretation (*)

William Graham Sumner was born in
Paterson, New Jersey, October 30, 1840. His
father, Thomas Sumner came from Lan-
cashire, England, in 1836. He migrated
to America because his father, who was
a weaver, had been ruined when power
driven machine replaced the hand
loom in textile industry.

Sumner, after graduation from col-
lege, went abroad for further study. He
was at Göttingen in 1864, where he
studied history, and at Oxford in

(*) An address delivered before the Chinese Social
and Political Association in December, 1932

1866, where he studied Theology. In 1872 he was elected professor of political and social science ~~at the~~ in Yale College. He had previously been rector of Calvary Church, New York City. He wrote extensively and on a variety of subjects and since his death these scattered writings have been edited and published by his former colleague, Albert Gallaway Keller, Professor of the Science of Society at Yale University.

In 1890 Sumner began to write a textbook in Sociology from materials which he used in his lectures. But at a certain point, as he says, he found that he wanted to introduce his own statement of the mores, and thereupon he turned aside to write a treatise on the Folkways. This volume which the author refers

to as "my last book", is probably the most original contribution of any American writer thus far to the subject of Sociology.

Folkways is not a systematic treatise and nowhere in this volume has the author attempted a final and fundamental description of society as he conceived it. There is, nevertheless, implicit in this and other writings

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of Sumner a conception of society which is unique and, in the present state of social sciences, useful as well. It is useful because it is comprehensive: brings together so many divergent points of view - biological, economical, political, historical - and because it is based on

so wide a range of knowledge of the ways in which men ~~to~~ have been observed to act, when they act collectively.

Society, according to Sumner, is in its most obvious aspect a territorial organization and hence, primarily, a geographical phenomenon. The conception of "primitive society that we ought to form", he says, "is that of small groups scattered over a territory. The size of the groups is determined by the conditions of the struggle for existence".¹ Within each one of these scattered groups there is peace and order. But between those different groups the normal relations are those

(¹) Sumner W. F., Folkways, Boston, Ginn, 1906
p. 12.

of mutual hostility. Having its origin under these circumstances, society has grown by the expansion of the area in which it was possible to maintain peace.

Peace within and war outside constitute the condition under which human nature and society came into existence and the conditions under which they continue to exist. The significant thing is that peace within is invariably a function of war without.

"Society", says Sumner, is a form of "antagonistic coöperation" and this phrase is intended to cover all the relations into which men enter and live, in society.

Sumner is not concerned in the study of the Folkways with the

individual. He takes the individual as something given, a biological unit which, when associated and bound together through custom and interest with other such units, constitutes society. It has not occurred to him, perhaps — or at any rate he is not concerned at the moment with the fact — that the biological individual assumes only in society the character of a person, and that these individual personalities are very largely a product of their associations. This aspect of society was later developed by Cooley in ~~his Human Nature and the~~ Human Nature and the Social Order. 432.

Cooley in his Human Nature and the Social Order, and more

particularly by Thomas and Lianiecki in their monumental work The Polish Peasant. (2)

The reason Sumner is so little concerned with the individual is because he is, or was at the time ~~of~~ Folkways was written, so little concerned with process. The individual is invariably an innovating factor in social change, while the function of custom and institution, and ultimately of every form of social control is to conserve, adapt and transmit these institutions and all ~~the~~ other forms of coöperation and collective action in which are ordinarily ~~and~~ carried on that form of life we call social.

(2) Cooley, C. H., Human Nature and the Social Order, New York, C. Scribner's Sons, 1902.
Thomas, William I., and Lianiecki, The Polish Peasant, New York, A. A. Knopf, 1927.

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In Folkways the volume upon which this paper is mainly based, Sumner sought, on the whole, to analyze and describe the different forms and types of relationship into which men have become involved in their efforts to cooperate and act collectively. (3) He was not at the moment greatly concerned with processes by which these customs and institutions came into existence; although he does refer to them, in his account of the clans and masses. (4)

It is with these relationship — Beziehungen, to use von Wiese's term — with which this paper is concerned. (5)

3. Folkways, pp. 39-54. 4. For a statement of Sumner's conception of the historical and evolutionary process, see Sumner, W. F., and Keller, A. F. Science of Society, 4 vols. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1927. 5. Leopold von Wiese and Becker, H. Systematic Sociology, New York, Wiley, 1932, pp. 43-44.

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Not all these relationships, it must be confessed, are explicitly set forth in Sumner's text. They are, however, implicit in his general conception of society and it is the intention of what follows ^(not only) to formulate these notions but to set

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them forth in some sort of systematic order. In doing this it is not my purpose to expound Sumner's philosophy but rather to exhibit the logical structure of his thought.

Looked at abstractly, and from the point of view of statistical enumeration, society presents itself as a mere numerical aggregate, the units of which are distributed in space. This special distribution exhibits,

revis special?

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however, certain characteristic pat-
terns and certain recurring con-
stellations of people and of habi-
tations, — i. e., villages, towns,
cities, etc. — which suggest the
influence of tendencies and the
play of forces not reckoned
with so long as societies are
regarded as mere runs and
aggregates of isolated and in-
dependent units. It is not that
this isolation and independence
does not exist. It does, but not
in the ~~same~~ degree and to
the extent which this conception
of society would seem to suggest.

As a matter of fact any exist-⁽⁶⁾
ing distribution of population is
probably due to what Sumner

6. J. S. B., An Introduction to Eco-
nomic History, New York, Harper, 1922.

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has described as "the competition of
life". Man is everywhere involved
in a struggle with other men,
— and with the living organisms
~~in~~ by which he is surrounded, —
for a place and a position within
the limits of the habitable ~~and~~
world, what the Greeks called the
oikonomia. This struggle is itself
a societal force since it leads
man to enter into associations
and alliances with other men in
order not merely to live, but
to live more abundantly. The
distribution of the population in
all its characteristic forms, turns
out thus to be an evidence of
and an index to, the existence
within the population group of a
form of competitive cooperation,

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which is one of the characteristic aspects of every society. The distribution of population which results from the competition of life is what may be called the ecological organization of society. A society that is organized ecologically, that is on a territorial basis, is not merely a society, it is a community.

The tendencies or forces which have effected the existing distribution of world population are mainly, but not wholly, economic. People come

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together much as the different plant species that constitute a plant community, because

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they are useful to one another. If they succeed in establishing relatively stable relations among themselves it is because there are some advantages in a division of labor and in an exchange of goods and services. Primarily the territorial is an aspect of the economic organization, and every community, whatever other interests intimate relations it implies rests upon a communal economy. Thus, in the course of his economic history, man has developed in historical succession, as Gras has pointed out, a village, town, city and metropolitan economy, and in the present world economy all of these different historical types persist, considerably modified.

to be pure by their interrelations as parts of one vast complex and world community.

The competition of life, as Sumner has conceived it, is a broader and more inclusive affair than economic competition, since economic competition invariably takes place within the limits, at least, of some sort of consensus and understanding — in which the free play of competition is measurably restricted and controlled. On the other hand competition goes on even within the limits of civil society, in manifold ways of which we who are more concerned are only dimly conscious or wholly unaware. The "compe-

petition of life" is what Darwin called "the struggle for existence". Economic competition on the other hand, is the struggle ~~of~~ for a livelihood and for a vocation, i. e., for a place in the traditional and accepted economic order.

Commerce and industry, the economic division of labor, and all the institutions which exist to effect an exchange of goods and services are directly and indirectly the consequences of economic competition. Economic competition, however, is but one aspect of the competition of life.

The effects of competition, particularly in those conscious forms we call rivalry and conflict, are reflected back upon and modify the individual

personalities involved. Trade and barters, for example, as they are conducted in a primitive market, intensify in the individual his self-consciousness and his egoism. Personal conflict of any sort seems to enhance the individual's sense of personal freedom and of personal responsibility. It is one of the ways in which individuation takes place, i. e., the process by which each of us, sooner or later, and then ~~only~~ only more or less, comes into possession of his personal freedom, i. e., his moral independence of the custom and tradition in which he has grown up.

On the other hand competition and collective action lessen the personal tension in the individual and increase the solidarity of the group. Thus competition, when it becomes conscious, manifests itself subjectively by ~~modifying~~ modifying the individual's conception of ~~itself~~ himself; and objectively, by determining his status in the group, since the status which any person achieves in any society is due finally, to his success in the role he is assigned, to play there.

Thus the individual ego, which may said to expand with personal success, correspondingly shrinks under the humiliation of personal defeat, and this is due, in part at least, to the fact that the

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individual's conception of him-
self, which is so important a
function in individual conduct,
is very largely the reflection
he sees of himself in the eyes
of his fellows.

It has been said, and not
without some truth that, of
all animals, man is the one
of whom we know least.
Even what we know with
anything like certainty about
mankind we seem to have
learned from the study of
creatures whose behavior is far
less elaborate than our own.
We know, however, that man
does not carry on in the com-
petition of life, nor even in
the struggle for a livelihood, in

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the free, independent and self
determined fashion of the economic
man, as the classic economists
conceive him. Always he is
bound by custom, convention, tra-
dition and conscience. Most of the
traits of mankind that are charac-
teristically human, — his vocation,
politics and religion — are acquir-
ed not merely in competition
but in cooperation with other
men, and in general, through
participation in the common
conscious life of the race.

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Sumner seems to have conceived
society in general somewhat as he
described primitive society, as "a

group of groups". Each of these groups, like the individuals of which it is composed, is a more or less morally isolated: an independent center of life, of interest and of action. It is what Sumner calls a "we-group".

In the isolation and intimacies of ~~we~~ these so-called "we-groups", the individual who composed them are often so completely submerged, and so completely subordinated, that sometimes they do seem to exist as independent personalities. Sumner called these smaller collective units we-group because the use of that term, with reference to itself, was a recognition by each group of its individual identity, so-

lidity, and unique position with reference to every other.

This is the significance of the term ethnocentrism which Sumner seems to have coined to describe a relationship between groups, similar to that which exists between individual persons. Ethnocentrism describes a point of view from which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled down and rated with reference to it. On the whole one must admit that this ~~is~~ naive view of things is more or less inevitable and founded in human nature since, from the point of view of ~~the actor, and the relative importance of things,~~ action, dis-

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Tastes and values are necessarily reckoned from the point of view of the actor, and the relative importance of things is naturally estimated, not merely from the point of their abstract desirability, but from their accessibility to control and ultimate consumption.

Ethnocentrism was apparently coined on the analogy of ego-centrism and, as Sumner uses it, seems to apply more ~~or~~ to those small and scattered ethnic groups of which primitive society is composed. But it seems to apply to any "we-group": that is any group which, because of its unusual isolation and of the pressing necessity for concerted and collective action, as developed an esprit de corps

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which enables it to act effectively, in a hostile environment. The primitive tribe is, perhaps, the typical instance of such we-group, but a religious sect, a boy's gang, a nationality ⁴³⁷ or a nation that feels itself in a perilous position, or even a minority party in a hostile ~~group~~ public are, characteristic examples of the ~~we-group~~ we-group and of the situation in which the characteristic traits of we-groups manifest themselves. Fundamentally, I suppose, a we-group is any group that acts collectively.

The significant thing with reference to these "inter" and "intro" relationships, — i.e., the relation-

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ship between the individuals that
compose them, — is that they are,
as Sumner says, "correlative to
each other". The rule that hos-
tility without tends to mobilize
and raise the morale of the for-
ces within applies with equal
validity to individuals and to
groups. From the fact that
loyalty, discipline and peace
in the in-group seem to be
the normal response to hostility
and warfare in the inter-group,
there emerges the conception of
two correlative systems of
relationships, moral and politi-
cal. In the in-group the rela-
tion of individuals, based ~~on~~
~~by~~ as they are on intimate
and personal associations, once

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they are fixed in customs and
sanctioned by religion, assume
the character of a moral order.

On the other hand inter-
group relationships, based lar-
gely on accommodation between
otherwise hostile units, may
be described in contrast to in-
tra-group relations, as politi-
cal or something approaching
it. They are political in the
sense that they represent a
modus vivendi, however arri-
ved at, between parties of diver-
gent and conflicting interests.

Such an accommodation may
involve nothing more than a
temporary alliance. It may
involve the permanent subordi-
nation of one group by other.

It is Oppenheimer's contention that historically the state is such an accommodation: that in fact the state has arisen in every instance as the result of a conquest of a sedentary and agricultural, by a nomadic people, with the result that the agricultural people constituted the laboring, and

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the nomads the ruling caste. (7)
In any case the subordination and superordination of peoples, however it arises, once they are accepted and sanctioned by religion as

7) Oppenheimer, F., The State, New York, Vanguard Press, 1922 Ch II

ric

well as law, tend to lose their character as political modus vivendi and assumes the form and function of a sacred institution.

Thus began slavery in the United States, which arose historically in Virginia and elsewhere as a successor and a substitute for white servitude, gradually gained legal definition and recognition and, finally came to have, in the Southern States at least, the sanction of the church. The origin of the system of caste in India is more obscure but it seems to have been, in the first instance, a modus vivendi between peoples of different racial stocks.

People who live together are not

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always incorporated into the same moral and political order. The Jews, in the long course of their ~~and~~ racial and tribal history, have lived among many peoples in relations that Israel Langewies once described as symbiotic i.e. they participated in the economic life, but chose to maintain their moral independence and their ancient tribal religion and culture. Though they did not intermarry with the peoples among whom they resided, they did not, as might have been expected, constitute a caste.

Society thus resolves itself, upon analysis, into a hierarchy of relationships — ecological, economic, political and moral — ranging

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from associations that are purely symbiotic and biological, — such as exist between plants and animals in a plant or animal community — to those more intimate, personal, even mystic associations, such as one ordinarily meets in the family, in primitive society and in religious sects.

Social relationships are manifestly complex and difficult to clarify. However the systems of relationships here sketched are typical, at least of societies territorially organized, and represent, as a matter of fact, ⁴³⁹ just those obvious aspects of society upon which, historically, most concepts of society ~~had~~ have been

based. Furthermore, concepts of society, like concepts in other fields of observation and investigation, are ordinarily nothing more than descriptions, a little more general and a little more precise, of objects viewed from some special and restricted point of view. It is obvious, therefore, that almost any society, depending upon the point of view from which one looks at it, may be regarded as (1) a statistical unit, or "mere geographical expression", to use Mettlenich's famous phrase, (2) an ecological organization, or (3) an economic, (4) a political or (5) cultural entity.

From these different points of view any society, territorially or

sanitized, may become the subject of at least four distinct social sciences: (1) human geography and human ecology, (2) economics, (3) political science and (4) social anthropology and sociology, not to mention history which, although it has formulated no concept of society ~~and~~ ~~human relations~~ of its own, is probably more important for the ~~under~~ understanding of society and human relations generally than any or all the others.

If now we attempt to examine a little more closely these different systems of relationships in which individuals in society are inevitably involved, viz. the ecological, economic, political and

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moral, we find ourselves in difficulty because of the fact that, although there different forms of association exist in greater or less independence of one another, they rarely occur in isolation. Thus there is no question that man lives with other men, as he does with the plants, animals and other living things, in relations that are often parasitic or symbiotic, at any rate biological rather than social.

Consider, for example, the gypsies, the criminals, outlaws and professional beggars — pariah peoples, who, in our great cities, live in a region we call the "under world". The relation of

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these people to ourselves is not exactly social. They do not co-operate in the common tasks and they do not live according to the accepted codes. Sumner refers to them as the "⁴⁴⁰inner enemies" — but they are actually neither enemies, nor rebels. They are, perhaps, more properly described, parasites, alien organisms, performing no function in the communal economy. But after all, they are not quite that either; for we hold ourselves, somehow and to some extent, morally responsible for them.

On the other hand, in the larger world community, we are in relations that are more sym-

brother than social with vast numbers of people who, without knowledge of us ~~or~~ or we of them, are toiling silently, in remote places, to maintain this vast structure of international exchange and division of labor in which we live. But even in the small local communities, where we are in some sort of personal contact with one another, the competition of life goes on, below the level of economic competition, in ways of which we are not wholly conscious and over which we have little control. The vital nexus by which man is bound up with other men is manifest in the manner in which disease is

communicated. As Carlyle put it, the essential brotherhood of man is disclosed in places we had least expected to find it, - by plague and pestilence.

Fundamentally the human, like ~~the~~ plant or animal, community, is an agglomeration of individuals living together in just this vital interdependence. There is, however, this difference: in the plant community there is no consensus. Plants are not inhibited by the knowledge of what other plants expect of them. They are not controlled by custom, fashion, convention, etiquette, public opinion and public policy, nor inhibited by any sort of taboos or

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fear of the immediate or ultimate consequences of their acts. In short the plant community is a geographical and ecological phenomenon, but is not — in the sense in which that is true of the human community — a society.

This does not mean that the forms of competition and cooperation which are responsible for the plant association do not exist among human beings. It means, simply, that in the human community the forces or tendencies⁴⁴¹ which bring men together in some sort of symbiosis are modified by other forces, notably political and moral, so that the resulting distribution and

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ecological organization is not what it would be if there more or less conscious forms of association — economic, political and moral — were not superimposed upon it.

The plant community is one in which — if I am permitted to employ a political term in a biological sense, — the individuals of which it is composed, live in harmonious anarchy, a condition akin to that of natural harmony as conceived by Adam Smith and the physiocrats, in which the individual man, by pursuing exclusively his individual profit, contributed the most possible to the general welfare.

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In human society this harmony is complicated by communication, since communication, as John Dewey has pointed out, always involves some degree of participation, by those who communicate, each in the life of the other. Men are so constituted that, as they become aware of other men, — that is aware of them as persons, — they are disposed, just in the degree that this acquaintance becomes intimate and personal, to act toward them — as Kant's fundamental law of ethics prescribes — as if they follow creatures like themselves. The fundamental ethical law, as Kant stated it, is this: men

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should always and everywhere treat men as persons rather than things.

As a matter of fact this is, measurably and on the whole, the way men do deal with one another in so far as the distances, — social as well as physical — which separates them are reduced and eventually dissolved. The moral order imposes itself upon the geographical and natural, just in so far as communication becomes not merely less difficult but more intimate and complete.

Robert E. Park
Yenching University
Peking, Dec. 8, 1932