

The Methodological Problems and Criteria of Sociology in The First Half of The Twentieth Century

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I. PREFACE

As they say all things are transient, it would be impossible for us to realize abrupt changes in the world so strongly as today. To add to this, it would be no easy work how to deal with them. We are sorry that sociology, responsible for the study of objective cognition on this reality and the pursuit for its truth, is too poor in scientific thinking when we face such critical conditions in the historical and social reality of today. However, the greater our worries grow in this view, the more scientifically we sociologists must grasp the social practices of the man who thinks and practises according to social consciousness. Even in the midst of this social reality, complicated and unending, that surrounds us, we are enabled to fit our social conducts to their aims, which simply shows that we depend upon our objective cognition of society. Science, in fact, can be said to have originated from everyday knowledge, which satisfies

such practical requirements, becoming purified into form. But the claim of its practical behavior grows so pressing that science probably will fall a victim to its own practical requirements and come to serve to its practical dogma forcibly, involved in the disorder of the present social standing. Then men's scientific cognition will get limited and distorted, rather than developed, by its practical requirements. This learning attitude neither means that the theoretical nature of science is verified by its practice, nor teaches any way to overcome the crisis in scientific thinking; on the contrary, it is that of a scientist to plunge himself into the shifts of the present state and throw out the theoretical nature of science into social practice. Here exists a crisis in pragmatism.

The man is a doer of social conduct and at once a constituent of social reality as the object to be cognized and the subject to cognize it; in other words, the man conducts, practises and at the same time puts his practice into a scientific cognitional system according to his objective observation of it. Thus the man is claimed more objectivity in social scientific cognition, restrained constantly to be at once the subject and object of cognition. When the subject of theoretical cognition maintains a composed objective distance from social reality as the object, scientific cognition will become possible for the first time. For that reason the social cognition of society should always subordinate its practical consciousness to its cognitional one and also verify the truth of the theory by practice.

Sociology was established at the beginning as "*Savoir pour prévoir afin de pouvoir!*" That was expressive of A. Comte's learning attitude to try rationally to lead the paradoxes of modern society to stability. Even though in his mind a religious conviction founded on his deep love of mankind ever hung about his learning attitude, A. Comte made a constant attempt to research social reality in a natural scientific way and aimed at the improvement and progress of society with the results of his researches. It is a matter for regret in its methodology, but merely fell into such a self-satisfaction that

it was the very method of natural science to handle general human phenomena as social organisms in contrast with biological ones. Therefore, though early encyclopaedic sociology made every possible effort after the scientific understanding of human society, it could not get rid of a historical philosophical tendency in its methodology. Besides, as synthetical encyclopaedic sociology grew unable to stand aloof from the current in which other sciences of society went forward in differentiation and specialization, a criticism rose out of the sociology itself in its methodology. It indicated "sociology as a special science". The new sociology of the twentieth century tried a start upon such a foundation as this. L. von Wiese⁽¹⁾, who asserted that the real establishment of sociology proved possible for the first time in the twentieth century, regarded it in the proper sense as found chiefly in its works since 1890 and those before as of the pre-history of sociology.

II.

The Genealogy of Sociology in The First Half of the Twentieth Century

For long the right of life as an independent science had not been given to sociology because it, regarding real society as an organic body, insisted to take encyclopaedic cognition over the whole range of society. Now sociology was brought up to settle pure objects peculiar to itself by means of limiting its own special range so as to secure the citizenship of a special science as well as other social sciences. Those who found "the sociological" in the exclusive objects of sociology were so-called *Formal Sociologist*. They sought for it in forms and modes expressed in the process of human psychological association, but not in the cultural contents of such social phenomena as politics, economy, law, morality, religion, art, etc. To G. Simmel these forms of socialization were very "sociological". Though the older social sciences had considered the contents of each individual social phenomenon as the object of each study, they had not dealt

with the form of socialization associated with the contents. Formal Sociology took it as its exclusive object. The tendency to win for sociology a recognition as a special science by means of abstracting "the social" out of real society, avoiding to survey its cultural contents on the whole, was followed by many Formal Sociologists after G. Simmel, but each showed more or less some differences in what to take as "social", in a concrete form, into the fundamental subject of his study. G. Simmel found the object of "the social" in "*Formen der vergesellschaftung*"; A. Vierkandt, his student, in "*innere Verbundenheit*"; L. von Wiese, in "*soziale Prozesse*" or "*soziale Beziehungen*"; G. Tarde in France, in "*imitation*" A. Small in the United States of America, in "process of human association"; F. H. Giddings, in "pluralistic behavior"; E. A. Ross. in "social process" and R. M. Maclver, in "social relationships as such". In Japan Y. Takata and K. Komatsu, seeking for the object in association, launched out into Formal Sociology and published many works in the Japanese language. In the other countries also they attempted to acquire the independence of sociology through setting up a number of Formal Sociological methodologies, which followed to bring forth as many branches. To make sociology recognized as a special science, these branches, however, tried to abstract something "social" seemingly leaving the cultural contents of society as the common denominator. In this view we may acknowledge that Formal Sociology succeeded at any rate to get the characteristics of its object.

Nevertheless, it was by no means a satisfactory result, for it might be said to be empirical in its methodology, but not positive. For the purpose that sociology gets authorized as a social science, it should both have the exclusive object of its study and be scientific in its methodology. But because often in the field of Formal Sociology there were left no few metaphysical, speculative and philosophical elements, it can not be denied, it could not become a complete positive science. Moreover, methodological criticisms on the Formal Sociologists turned towards the fact that they were isolated from the living reality of the time; that is, hard shifting reality cast a strict

criticism on the sociology which considered "the social", empty and non-historical, as its object. It became incapable to check the desire of the time that sociology should overcome the characteristics, both abstract and non-productive, of Formal Sociology and waft around itself again the fragrance, positive and practical, pregnant with Comtian spirit. The more ripened Formal Sociology got, specialized on the formal or psychological grounds, the more heightened up grew the dissatisfaction on the other hand that it was inactive and incapable to the cultural contents of reality. The World War I. spurred it up to lead sociology to the direction of realizing itself once again. What answered to this requirement was so-called Cultural Sociology. It came into the world as the sociology on culture which was to research, first of all, historical and social reality on the whole. The students belonging to this Cultural Sociology naturally showed some differences according to the actual state of each country. In Germany a historical tendency had much influence upon the new sociologies, which appeared in such forms as follows: "*Materialistische Geschichtsauffassung*" of K. Marx, "*Kultursoziologie*" of A. Weber, "*Wissenssoziologie*" of M. Scheler and K. Mannheim, "*Soziologie als Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*" of H. Freyer, etc. In the United States and England cultural or anthropological, instead of psychological, tendencies came out; for instance, W. F. Ogburn's "Social change", A. Thomas and F. Znaniecki's "The Polish Peasant in Europe and America", R. S. and H. M. Lynd's "Middle Town", W. L. Warner's "Yankee City Series", etc. appeared in the United States, and, in England positive and synthetical social anthropology conceived in B. Malinowski's "Argonauts of the Western", Radcliffe-Brown's "The Andaman Islanders", etc. made its mark. We may receive here an impression that new sociologies had been overproduced, but at the same time perceive sociology in its youth casting off its old clothing in order to stand as a real science and its historical process to grasp in a scientific way human coefficients that compose social reality. Cultural Sociology, therefore, was no completed system, but only a tendency of a jumbledup household containing various types and schools.

III. The Methodological Problems of Sociology

In order to pass through the encyclopaedic tendency and to become a special science, sociology made a fresh start as Formal Sociology, which abstracted the pure social out of reality and decided it as the only object of the study. In this case, because of its selected object being of no contents, non-historical and non-productive, it shortened the life of the sociology in spite of its purpose. To be recognized its individuality by itself and others as a social science, sociology should decide, first of all, the range of the object peculiar to it. Does that mean, however, to determine the particular contents of social phenomena and cut them out? G. Simmel had tried to find "the sociological" in social phenomena, which, he took notice, had already been reserved for other social phenomena, which, he took notice, had already been reserved for other social sciences. In this consequence, he gave up looking for the range of the object in the contents of social phenomena and turned his eyes to the form of socialization. He must have thought sociology might be unable to acquire its individuality unless it decided its particular object regarded as "sociological". However, are there no other means at all than to decide the particularities of the object so that a science may maintain its individuality? Even in cognizing the same social phenomenon, different angles of cognition can spontaneously display as many different aspects of the object; that is, it is possible to catch the same object in various forms according to the various methods of cognition. If sociology is to decide its particular cognitional attitude, won't there come up the object of sociological cognition even if it is the same social phenomenon? If so, the interest and cognitional method characteristic of sociology are the very conditions to make it worthy of its name and to raise its own cognitional object. But there is a sociologist who lays stress on the point that it is not by the subjective intention of the cognizer, but by the characters of the object that historical and social reality, the object of sociology, is separated from nature; that is to say, the close relationship between these two

is formed that the object of cognition fixes its method. It is H. Freyer⁽²⁾ who emphasized that it should be the starting point in sociology to understand, first of all, the characteristics of the object of the study. In carrying out the methodological research of sociology, he tried to begin with the theoretical research of what characteristics social reality had. If sociology were to grasp social life as reality, it should develop its own methodology founded on the inevitability of its particular object and become such a real science as recognizes social reality scientifically.⁽³⁾ For the purpose to understand such logical characteristics of sociology, let me survey H. Freyer's analysis of the characteristics of social reality.

In the first place he put emphasis that the man himself is the object that composes social phenomena and the identity of the object with the subject must be paid essential attention in the cognition of social phenomena. The subject of cognition to grasp social reality is constantly placed in the existent situation destined to be related to the formation and changes of social reality at the bottom of its existence. There exists, therefore, the basis of right cognition where the intention of social reality begins to be considered as that of the cognizer.⁽⁴⁾

Next he fixed his eyes on the fact that social reality is restrained by time as its second characteristic;⁽⁵⁾ or social organization is not only a product historical creation, but exists in its process. It is constantly shifting in causal relation. Because all social facts are placed in the concrete course of time, each phenomenon of which is put in the fixed historical position, each individual phenomenon is restrained to exist in the order of priority according to its historical time.

The last characteristic of social reality he counted is the practical one of reality⁽⁶⁾ which develops from the two aforesaid characteristics synthesized. Social creation being such an unretrogressing existence that is constantly progressing towards the present, the sociological object in general is living reality provided with its restraint and inevitability in the present. The past there is no mere past, but the

past alive in the present, restraining reality; the future is, we must also admit, no mere future, but the future existing with inevitability already conceived in the present.

As H. Freyer pointed out, if we should understand the object of sociology on the bases of such characteristics of social reality, it might be said due to the scientific self-consciousness of social reality that living reality cognizes itself in the first place. Here we must not miss the practical significance is added that both the subject to cognize and the object to be cognized are we ourselves who acted in the past and are acting in the present toward the future. Such a concept of real science as H. Freyer's seems to imply not only the objective meaning of social reality but also its methodological meaning consequently.

We see in American sociology too these who emphasize that the object of social science is fundamentally different from that of natural science. In American Cultural Sociology society is equal to culture in a broad sense and culture is what the man forms and what is formed by the man's intention; it signifies something natural, spiritual and systematical cultured by the man. In this sense sociology aims to learn human formations intertwined with humankind. F. Znaniecki calls them "humanistic coefficients".

Even if it is true, we do not think we put a period to the methodology of sociology at once for the reason only, for we are aware of on little unconformity in the understanding of the term methodology in general. In the understanding of the meaning of "methodology" there are two different trends. If we make distinctions between them in the American and German terms, both have a prejudice in favor of "methodology", but we take notice of a complete difference between what each methodology means.

The method which the American sociologists usually use signifies a technique of study in general. They call the way a method to express the results in graphs and statistics after gathering, reporting, putting in order and classifying facts. The German sociologists on

the other hand seem to understand the theory as a methodology which classifies facts into categories, decides correlations among the categories, analyzes social phenomena or inclusive social movements into principal factors and brings forth synthetical explanations. Now we may think over ways of study in science, roughly dividing into two main theories about "methodology" and "method": the former is called what fixes a basic position for a science to stand worthy of its name and what makes the methodological basis firm that systematizes and organizes the science; the latter, on the contrary, deals with technical valuation as the way of the concrete grasp of empirical existence, so that it indicates a way and technique how concretely to grasp social phenomena scientifically.

In so far as there exist such contradictory theories in understanding the meaning of "methodology", we dare not affirm that we are in so happy a state as to determine the range of the study in the same opinion merely because of the self-evident fact that sociology is a science on human co-operative life. Admitting that there always exist more or less different schools and tendencies in any social science, we are able to recognize the common denominator among them. In sociology, nevertheless, it is not the same. It is in such a disorderly state of no limitation of the range of its aim, method and study as is laughed at there being as many sociological systems as the sociologists. For instance, while sociology followed until recently the philosophical and speculative tendencies in its methodology both in Germany and in Japan, there was formed a main tendency in American Sociology that it should be as one of natural sciences. These two extremes were accepted as a matter of course. The confrontation, of course, got somewhat relieved at the end of the World War II. The two have exchanged their views and by degrees taken in positive and researching characteristics. There is no denying the fact that a methodological introspection comes to rise in each country. It is expressive of the effort for sociology to grow truly to be a rigid science of observation, giving up all exertions to construct itself speculatively on a metaphys-

ical basis, which is no patent of American Sociology alone, but Vilfredo Pareto's "*Methodo logico-experimentale*" in Italy is nothing less than the expression of such an intention.⁽¹¹⁾ Furthermore, in France the school of E. Durkheim thought social phenomena being outside of individual consciousness as objective physical facts and rejected the psychologically subjective treatment of them. The tendency to study various human associative actions with the spirit and method of natural science, regarding social phenomena as natural and sociology as a natural science is developing into a conspicuous characteristic especially of American Sociology.⁽¹²⁾

Towards the close of the nineteenth century C. Menger stated that the confrontation in the theoretical studies of the two is none of the methods, but entirely that of the phenomena.⁽¹³⁾ Even if so, we have no courage to declare that a statistical method is of the most scientific value of all the sociological methods as Ogburn's view. Even though the natural scientific way of American Sociology possesses, to be sure, the practicality and validity of science, we have to impress on our mind that there naturally exists a limitation to conducting its quantitative methodology. It is good to take up a statistical method as that to observe social phenomena. We sent a high value on the distinguished work of Georg von Meyr⁽¹⁴⁾ which schemed to associate Rational Sociology with statistics in order to make a science on "Social Mass". However, if it did not pass through the level of a statistical description, exterior and superficial, of social phenomena, that method might be said to resolve nothing about the focus of the problems. One of the most important problems is how objectively to grasp the interior analysis of social phenomena as human coefficients. It is allowed to make good use of this statistical method as one means for that very purpose. It must start upon the statistical grasp of the exterior of social phenomena, which should lead to the objective understanding of the interior, otherwise that starting point would be of an aimless journey. We never fail to pay our respects to the scientific spirit to experiment social phenomena in isolated systems on the basis of operationalism, but at the same time we have doubts

whether it can or cannot solve the problems of time and historicity, for it cannot get rid of the historical restraint in observing social phenomena that the looseness of time, which occurs while we repeat experiments, changes them, the objects of cognition, in quality. If sociology is a science to purpose to understand society to the utmost as R. M. Maclver insisted, one method is available as far as it makes clear and solves our problems, but we should remember it goes no further. In so far as it leaves anything behind, we have no other way than to reconsider the methodology of sociology and try to push it forward. The sociology in the first half of the twentieth century may be said in this sense to have been in the very time to try and err in its methodology. As has been mentioned, sociology born in the previous century was, at the beginning, closely related to the social reality of the time and was theoretical consciousness itself for the purpose to resolve the problems of reality. Nevertheless, it grew required academism, keeping pace with the ever-changing times. European sociology, especially in Germany, deepened its idealistic and logical tendencies. Against these sociology rekindled its characteristics as a real science and returned to deal with living historical society as its object. There would be two points to decide which of the methodologies of sociology thus developing historically is the most valid: One is which methodology can explain history and reality best of all and the other is how far it can stand up to theoretical criticisms.

IV. The Methodological Criteria of Sociology

We must first recognize the world-historical subject of modern society previous to deciding the methodological criteria of sociology. We do not impose upon sociology as one of social sciences missions beyond the limitations of science. Nevertheless, it surely will remain a science for its own sake unless it is motivated by the social philosophical cognition that historical and social reality, the object of the study, has the life of the living man within. As one of the sociologists in the country twice inflicted the baptism of atomic bombs and experienced

the first damage of hydrogen bombs, I hope to research the methodological criteria of sociology as a science, cherishing the decisive view of social philosophy that it exists for the welfare of mankind, but for no sake of science. Indeed, science has made an unprecedented progress into the so-called atomic age in the twentieth century. In the meantime, many scientists have forgotten humanity and social philosophy in the motive of each study in order that they carry through an attitude faithful to science alone, to whom it exists for its own sake, but for no welfare of mankind. As Ogburn has already pointed out in the words "Culture Lag"⁽¹⁷⁾, scientists, face to face with the atomic age showing such an extraordinary limping tendency in the cultural progress of society, should take as each motive profound social philosophy grounded on humanity previous to the researches of each science. Now American Sociology is inclined to make light of theory in its social cognition, cuts down its relationship with the academic theories on the generality of social problems in favor of gathering materials for its special subject and isolates itself from social structure with the subject woven in it, which, as Mannheim indicated, proves scientific cognition has not yet been tied with philosophical training, enthralled so strongly by natural science as to hurry to distinguish between science and philosophy. As long as sociology is a recognized science, I think it proper that in its methodological process it should also depend upon a surpassing technique of sociological observation and a way of measurement, but at the bottom it has to secure the social significance and value-criteria of the special subject. We see that sociology too has broken into the age to found some of its methodological criteria as a science, keeping an eye to the development of society and the historical direction that mankind should pursue. After such prefatory remarks I should like to give some methodological criteria sociology must maintain as a social science.

The first is that sociology is a science to observe reality. Looking back upon the history of its development, we become

conscious of the fact that many forerunners have devoted themselves to exclude philosophy from sociology, which bears plenty of fruit specially in American Sociology. Its distinctive character is that, parallel with the general social theory or on its base, the analytical method of positive science has been adopted so that it has developed a technique to observe and survey concrete human society and behavior. As the result, a huge number of social records and positive researches of human behavior are accumulated there and at the same time a remarkable progress is seen in the method and technique to observe and survey society and human behavior. Sociology must, further than ever, improve the technique to observe human behavior and try various researches of human phenomena.

But that does not mean an allowance to ignore academic theories of society. Sociology will stand on its own legs as a true social science for the first time when the constructing of a theory on society and human behavior turns out a structure built up parallel with its positive research or on its base and these two get intertwined to become one of scientific products. Such efforts have been noticed in America.⁽¹⁹⁾ It leads sociology in the proper direction that it tries to construct its special theories applied to the limited social materials and consolidate groups of these special theories. We must not indulge in an idle argument, from an idealistic standpoint, about the methodological criteria of sociology aloof from the living materials, but exert our energies to proceed with our substantial study on the base of the secure materials of human behavior and set up its methodological investigation and academic theories. By such efforts alone the close association of empirical survey with general theory may get realized. It is not the best attitude for a sociologist to be absorbed in cutting reality with a blunt knife, nor is the sociology a meaningful existence that is polishing a knife without cutting reality. We are to feel the quality of the knife while cutting reality with it. If it is a duty for a sociologist to cut reality, it is necessary in the atomic age not to neglect to ask ourselves why we should cut reality with a sharper

knife, or else the knife will be a Frankenstein's murderous weapon.⁽²⁰⁾

V. Conclusion

There are many who study human phenomena. We accept them as sociologists, but among them some do not like to be called sociologists. Therefore, I avoid discussing here what sociology is. It is, in fact, deeply related with various neighboring sciences; some of the instances are seen in the development of Socio-psychology, Socio-anthropology . . . , etc. Side by side with the development of these sciences, various surveys on human phenomena are as much heaped up as techniques to research and gather materials advance. If sociology is to research the development of society according to the study of not only a small group or subgroup of society but also the general academic theories of it, it should construct its own general theories on the base of the various materials for human behavior, habits and systems. I believe that the welfare of mankind is established where there are general theories of human phenomena stored up in quantities, properly adopted and applied to social life.

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