

How is Society Possible?

Georg Simmel

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Kant could propose and answer the fundamental question of his philosophy, How is nature possible?, only because for him nature was nothing but the representation (Vorstellung) of nature. This does not mean merely that "the world is my representation," that we thus can speak of nature only so far as it is a content of our consciousness, but that what we call nature is a special way in which our intellect assembles, orders, and forms the sense-perceptions. These "given" perceptions, of color, taste, tone, temperature, resistance, smell, which in the accidental sequence of subjective experience course through our consciousness, are in and of themselves not yet "nature;" but they become "nature" through the activity of the mind, which combines them into objects and series of objects, into substances and attributes and into causal coherences. As the elements of the world are given to us immediately, there does not exist among them, according to Kant, that coherence (Verbindung) which alone can make out of them the intelligible regular (gesetzmässig) unity of nature; or rather, which signifies precisely the being-nature (Natur-Sein) of those in themselves incoherently and irregularly emerging world-fragments. Thus the Kantian world-picture grows in the most peculiar rejection (Wiederspiel). Our sense-impressions are for this process purely subjective, since they depend upon the physico-psychical organization, which in other beings might be different, but they become "objects" since they are taken up by the forms of our intellect, and by these are fashioned into fixed regularities and into a coherent picture of "nature." On the other hand, however, those perceptions are the real "given," the unalterably accumulating content of the world and the assurance of an existence independent of ourselves, so that now those very intellectual formings of the same into objects, coherences, regularities, appear as subjective, as that which is brought to the situation by ourselves, in contrast with that which we have received from the externally existent - i.e., these formings appear as the functions of the intellect itself, which in themselves unchangeable, had constructed from another sense-material a nature with another content. Nature is for Kant a definite sort of cognition, a picture growing through and in our cognitive categories. The question then, How is nature possible?, i.e., what are the conditions which must be present in order that a "nature" may be given, is resolved by him through discovery of the forms which constitute the essence of our intellect and therewith bring into being "nature" as such.

It is at once suggested that it is possible to treat in an analogous fashion the question of the aprioristic conditions on the basis of which society - is possible. Here too individual elements are given which in a certain sense always remain in their discreteness, as is the case with the sense-perceptions, and they undergo their synthesis into the unity of a society only through a process of consciousness which puts the individual existence of the several elements into relationship with that of the others in definite forms and in accordance with definite laws. The decisive difference between the unity of a society and

that of nature, however, is this: the latter - according to the Kantian standpoint here presupposed - comes to existence exclusively in the contemplating unity (Subject), it is produced exclusively by that mind upon and out of the sense materials which are not in themselves interconnected. On the contrary, the societal unity is realized by its elements without further mediation, and with no need of an observer, because these elements are consciously and synthetically active. The Kantian theorem, Connection (Verbindung) can never inhere in the things, since it is only brought into existence by the mind (Subject), is not true of the societal connection, which is rather immediately realized in the "things" - namely, in this case the individual souls. Moreover, this societal connection as synthesis, remains something purely psychical and without parallels with space-structures and their reactions. But in the societal instance the combining requires no factor outside of its own elements, since each of these exercises the function which, with respect to the external, the psychic energy of the observer supplies. The consciousness of constituting with the others a unity is the whole unity in question in the societal case. This of course means, on the one hand, not the abstract consciousness of the unity concept, but the innumerable singular relationships, the feeling and knowing about this determining and being determined by the other, and, on the other hand, it quite as little excludes an observing third party from performing in addition a synthesis, with its basis only in himself, between the persons concerned, as between special elements. Whatever be the tract of externally observable being which is to be comprehended as a unity. the consummation occurs not merely by virtue of its immediate and strictly objective content, but it is determined by the categories of the mind (Subject) and from its cognitive requirements. Society, however, is the objective unity which has no need of the observer not contained in itself.

The things in nature are, on the one hand, more widely separated than souls. In the outward world, in which each entity occupies space which cannot be shared with another, there is no analogy for the unity of one man with another, which consists in understanding, in love, in common work. On the other hand, the fragments of spatial existence pass into a unity in the consciousness of the observer, which cannot be attained by community of individuals. For, on account of the fact that the objects of the societal synthesis are independent beings, psychic centres, personal unities, they resist that absolute merging in the soul of another person, to which the selflessness (Selbstlosigkeit) of soulless things must yield. Thus a collection of men is really a unity in a much higher, more ideal sense, yet in a much lower degree than tables, chairs, sofa, carpet and mirror constitute "the furniture of a room," or river, meadow, trees, house, "a landscape," or in a painting "a picture."

In quite a different sense from that in which it is true of the external world, is society "my representation" (Vorstellung), i.e., posited upon the activity of consciousness. For the soul of another has for me the same reality which I myself have, a reality which is very different from that of a material thing. However Kant insists that objects in space have precisely the same certainty as my own existence, in the latter case only the particular contents of my subjective life can be meant; for the basis of representation in general, the feeling of the existing ego, is unconditional and unshakable to a degree attained by no single representation of a material externality.

But this very certainty has for us, justifiably or not, also the fact of the thou; and as cause or as effect of this certainty we feel the thou as something independent of our representation, something which is just as really for itself (genau so fur sich ist) as our own existence. That this for-itself of the other nevertheless does not prevent us from making it into Our representation, that something which cannot be resolved into our representing still becomes the content, and thus the product of our representation-this is the profoundest psychologico-epistemological pattern and problem of socialization. Within our own consciousness we distinguish very precisely between the fundamentality of the ego (the presupposition of all representation, which has no part in the never wholly suppressible problematics of its contents) and these contents themselves, which as an aggregate, with their coming and going, their dubitability and their fallibility, always present themselves as mere products of that absolute and final energy and existence of our psychic being. We must carry over to the other soul, however, these very conditions, or rather independence of conditions, of our own ego, although in the last analysis we must represent that soul. That other soul has for us that last degree of reality which our own self possesses in distinction from its contents. We are sure that the case stands the same way with the other soul and its contents. Under these circumstances, the question, How is Society possible? has a wholly different methodological bearing from the question, How is nature possible? The latter question is to be answered by the forms of cognition, through which the mind synthesizes given elements into "nature." The former question is answered by the conditions residing a priori in the elements themselves, through which they combine themselves actually into the synthesis "society." In a certain sense the entire contents of this book, as developed on the basis of the principle announced, may be regarded as the material for answering this question. The book searches out the procedures, occurring in the last analysis in individuals, which condition the existence of the individuals as society. It does not treat these procedures as temporally antecedent causes of this result, but as partial processes of the synthesis which we comprehensively name "society." But the question must be understood in a still more fundamental sense. I said that the function of achieving the synthetic unity, which with reference to nature resides in the observing mind, with reference to society passes over to the societary elements themselves. The consciousness of constituting society is not to be sure, in the abstract, present in the individual; but everyone always knows that the others are connected with himself, although this knowing about the other as the associated, this recognizing of the whole complex as a society usually occurs with reference to particular concrete contents. Perhaps, however, the case is not different from that of "the unity of cognition" (die Einheit des Erkennens), according to which we proceed indeed in the processes of consciousness, arranging one concrete content with another, yet without having a separate consciousness of the unity itself, except in rare and late abstractions. Now, the question is: What lies then, universally and a priori at the basis, what presuppositions must be operative, in order that the particular concrete procedures in the individual consciousness may actually be processes of socialization; what elements are contained in them which make it possible that the product of the elements is, abstractly expressed, the construction of the individual into a societary unity? The sociological apriorities will have the same

double significance as those "which make nature possible," on the one hand they will more or less completely determine the actual processes of socialization, as functions or energies of the psychical occurrence, on the other hand they are the ideal logical presuppositions of the perfect - although in this perfection never realized - society. A parallel is the use of the law of causation. On the one hand it lives and works in the actual cognitive processes. On the other hand it builds up the form of the truth as the ideal system of completed cognitions, irrespective of whether that truth is realized or not by that temporal, relatively accidental psychical dynamic, and irrespective of the greater or lesser approximation of the truth actually in consciousness to the ideal truth.

It is a mere question of terms whether investigation of these conditions of the socializing process shall be called epistemological or not, since that structure which arises from these conditions, and which has its norms in their forms, is not cognitions but practical processes and real situations. Nevertheless what I now have in mind, and what must be tested as the general concept of socialization by its conditions, is somewhat epistemological, viz., the consciousness of associating or of being socialized. Perhaps it should be called a knowing rather than a cognizing (besser ein Wissen als ein Erkennen). For in this case the mind does not immediately confront an object of which it gradually gains a theoretical picture, but that consciousness of the socialization is immediately its vehicle or inner significance. The matter in question is the processes of reciprocation which signify for the individual the fact of being associated. That is, the fact is not signified in the abstract to the individual, but it is capable of abstract expression. What forms must be at the basis, or what specific categories must we bring along, so to speak, in order that the consciousness may arise, and what consequently are the forms which the resulting consciousness - i.e., society as a fact of knowing - must bear? We may call this the epistemological theory of society. In what follows, I am, trying to sketch certain of these a priori effective conditions or forms of socialization. These cannot, to be sure, like the Kantian categories, be designated by a single word. Moreover, I present them only as illustrations of the method of investigation.

1. The picture which one man gets of another from personal contact is determined by certain distortions which are not simple deceptions from incomplete experience, defective vision, sympathetic or antipathetic prejudice; they are rather changes in principle in the composition of the real object. These are, to begin with, of two dimensions. In the first place we see the other party in some degree generalized. This may be because it is not within our power fully to represent in ourselves an individuality different from our own. Every reconstruction (Nachbilden) of a soul is determined by the similarity to it, and although this is by no means the only condition of psychical cognition (sic) - since on the one hand unlikeness seems at the same time requisite, in order to gain perspective and objectivity, on the other hand there is required an intellectual capacity which holds itself above likeness or unlikeness of being-yet complete cognition would nevertheless presuppose a complete likeness. It appears as though every man has in himself a deepest individuality-nucleus which cannot be subjectively reproduced by another whose deepest individuality is essentially different. And that this requirement is not logically compatible with that distance and objective judgment on which the

representation of another otherwise rests, is proved by the mere fact that complete knowledge of the individuality of another is denied to us; and all interrelations of men with one another are limited by the varying degrees of this deficiency. Whatever its cause may be, its consequence at all events is a generalization of the psychological picture of the other person, a dissolving of the outlines, which adds to the singularity of this picture a relationship with others. We posit every man, with especial bearing upon our practical attitude toward him, as that type of man to which his individuality makes him belong. We think him, along with all his singularity, only under the universal category which does not fully cover him to be sure, and which he does not fully cover. This latter circumstance marks the contrast between this situation and that which exists between the universal idea and the particular which belongs under it. In order to recognize the man, we do not see him in his pure individuality, but carried, exalted or degraded by the general type under which we subsume him. Even when this transformation is so slight that we cannot immediately recognize it, or even if all the usual cardinal concepts of character fail us, such as moral or immoral, free or unfree, domineering or menial, etc. - in our own minds we designate the man according to an unnamed type with which his pure individuality does not precisely coincide.

Moreover this leads a step farther down. Precisely from the complete singularity of a personality we form a picture of it which is not identical with its reality, but still is not a general type. It is rather the picture which the person, would present if he were, so to speak, entirely himself, if on the good or bad side he realized the possibility which is in every man. We are all fragments, not only of the universal man, but also of ourselves. We are onsets not merely of the type human being in general, not merely of the type good, bad, etc., but we are onsets of that not further in principle nameable individuality and singularity of our own selves which surrounds our perceptible actuality as though drawn with ideal lines. The vision of our neighbor, however, enlarges this fragment to that which we never are completely and wholly. He cannot see the fragments merely side by side as they are actually given, but as we offset the blind spot in our eye so that we are not conscious of it, in like manner we make of these fragmentary data the completeness of an individuality. The practice of life is more and more insistent that we shall form our picture of the man from the real details alone which we empirically know about him; but this very practice rests upon those changes and additions, upon the reconstruction of those given fragments into the generality of a type and into the completeness of this ideal personality.

This procedure, which is in principle attempted, although in reality it is seldom carried through to completeness, operates only within the already existing society as the apriori of the further reactions which develop between individuals. Within a sphere which has any sort of community of calling or of interests, every member looks upon every other, not in a purely empirical way, but on the basis of an apriori which this sphere imposes upon each consciousness which has part in it. In the circles of officers, of church members, of civil officials, of scholars, of members of families, each regards the other under the matter of course presupposition-this is a member of my group. From the common basis of life certain suppositions originate and people look upon one another through them as through a veil. This veil does not, to be sure, simply conceal the peculiarity of the individual, but it gives to this personality a new form, since

its actual reality melts in this typical transformation into a composite picture. We see the other person not simply as an individual, but as colleague or comrade or fellow partisan; in a word, inhabitant of the same peculiar world; and this unavoidable, quite automatically operative presupposition is one of the means of bringing his personality and reality in the representation of another up to the quality and form demanded of his sociability (Soziabilitat).

The same is evidently true of members of different groups in their relations with one another. The plain citizen who makes the acquaintance of an officer cannot divest himself of the thought that this individual is an officer. And although this being an officer may belong to the given individuality, yet not in just the schematic way in which it prejudices his picture in the representation of the other person. The like is the case with the Protestant in contrast with the Catholic, the merchant with the official, the layman with the priest, etc. Everywhere there occur veilings of the outline of reality by the social generalization. This in principle prohibits discovery of that reality within a group which is in a high degree socially differentiated. Accordingly man's representation of man is thrown out of true by dislocations, additions and subtractions from all these categories, which exert an a priori influence, since the generalization is always at the same time more or less than the individuality. That is, the individual is rated as in some particulars different from his actual self by the gloss imposed upon him when he is classified in a type, when he is compared with an imagined completeness of his own peculiarity, when he is credited with the characteristics of the social generality to which he belongs. Over and above all this there sways, as the principle of interpretation in cognition, the thought of his real solely individual equation; but since it appears as though determination of this equation would be the only way of arriving at the precisely founded relationship to the individual, as a matter of fact those changes and reshapings, which prevent this ideal recognition of him, are precisely the conditions through which the relationships which we know as the strictly social become possible - somewhat as with Kant the categories of reason, which form the immediately given into quite new objects, alone make the given world a knowable one.

2. Another category under which men (Subjecte) view themselves and one another, in order that, so formed, they may produce empirical society, may be formulated in the seemingly trivial theorem: - Each element of a group is not a societal part, but beyond that something else. This fact operates as social apriori in so far as the part of the individual which is not turned toward the group, or is not dissolved in it, does not lie simply without meaning by the side of his socially significant phase, is not a something external to the group, for which it nolens volens affords space; but the fact that the individual, with respect to certain sides of his personality, is not an element of the group, constitutes the positive condition for the fact that he is such a group member in other aspects of his being. In other words, the sort of his socialized-being (Vergesellschaftet-Seins) is determined or partially determined by the sort of his not-socialized being. The analysis to follow will bring to light certain types whose sociological significance, even in their germ and nature, is fixed by the fact that they are in some way shut out from the very group for which their existence is significant; for instance in the case of the stranger, the enemy, the criminal, and even the pauper. This

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