specialize, it is usually in a given "culture area," such as Melanesia. Sociologists more often study parts of a society, and generally specialize in some institution such as the family, or a process, such as social mobility. Anthropologists traditionally live in the community they study, directly observing behavior or recording customs as reported by their informants. Their method of analysis is essentially qualitative and "clinical." Sociologists more often rely on statistics and questionnaires; their analysis is more often formal and quantitative. The natural milieu for the anthropologist is the small self-contained group or community, whereas the sociologist is quite at ease in studying large-scale and impersonal organizations and processes.

So long as there are distinctive indigenous peoples preserving their unique cultures, anthropologists will not lack for a special subject matter. Even if many of the people he studies move into the modern world, the anthropologist may follow comfortably along so long as "his" people maintain a distinctive community within the framework of the larger society. But as its traditional subjects become fully acculturated, and are dispersed throughout the larger society and absorbed within it, anthropology will be less able to survive as a distinctive discipline. It may become a branch of sociology specializing in the study of values or the small community; or it may be entirely absorbed, along with sociology, in a general science of society.

Disciplines, Boundaries, and Issues

Benjamin Kidd, writing about sociology in the 11th edition of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, said: "From the 17th century forward it may be said, strictly speaking, that all leading contributions to the general body of Western philosophy have been contributions to the science of society (sociology)." He went on to point out that over the years the following terms have been seriously proposed as substitutes for the word "sociology": politics, political science, social economy, social philosophy, and social science.[13] Under the circumstances, any novice in the field must surely be forgiven if he expresses some bewilderment when faced with the task of distinguishing one social science from another. Maintaining these distinctions is made more difficult by the readiness of sociologists to accept responsibility for any institution which is not already the subject of an established discipline. To the degree that these subjects are important and would otherwise be neglected, sociologists deserve more to be praised than criticized. The scholarly world has shown a remarkable capacity to exclude from serious study enormous ranges of human activity, as if the common human nature expressed in family life, in stratification, in crime, made these vulgar studies unfit subjects for gentlemen scholars. For a new branch of study to win recognition in the university and the learned academies has been only slightly less difficult than for the camel to pass through that gate in Jerusalem known as "the needle's eye."

This open quality of sociology, its ready acceptance of new topical fields, stems from the sociologist's general concern with systems of social action and their interrelations.[14] Inevitably this leads him to deal with all aspects of man's social life, whether or not the subject has already been marked out as the special province or preserve of some other discipline.

There is no court to which we can turn for the adjudication of such

[13] "Sociology," Vol. XXV, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1911); p. 322 *ff.*

[14] Systems of social action are defined and discussed in Chap. 5.

territorial disputes. Of each intellectual discipline which takes a particular subject in hand we may inquire: Does it ask challenging questions? Is there, or can we devise, a method for exploring the questions it raises? Once applied, will this method yield meaningful facts? Can these facts be grouped together to formulate conclusions or generalizations which are contributions to knowledge? Do these conclusions now point the way to new questions which can carry us still further forward in our effort to understand man and his works? How, and how well, sociology meets these challenges we shall see in subsequent chapters. In the next section we seek the answer to the first question: What is the main issue to which sociology addresses itself?

Toward a Definition of Sociology: Social Order, Disorder, and Change

If you were to insist that the basic problem to which sociology addresses itself be described in a single phrase, we would reply: It seeks to explain the nature of social order and social disorder.

Sociology shares with all other essentially scientific perspectives the assumption that there is order in nature, and that it can be discovered, described, and understood. Just as the laws of physics describe the underlying order governing the relation of physical objects, astronomy the order of the planetary system, geology the order underlying the history and present structure of the earth, so sociology seeks to discover, describe, and explain the order which characterizes the social life of man.

When we speak of "order" we mean that events occur in a more-or-less regular sequence or pattern, so that we can make an empirically verifiable statement about the relation of one event to another at given points in time under specified conditions. Sociology deals with several such forms of order, varying greatly in scale but each having substantially the same character.

The problem is perhaps most evident at the level of the largest unit with which sociology usually deals, the nation-state or other form of large-scale society. Collectively, the members of a large society perform millions, or even billions, of social acts in the course of a single day.[15] Yet the outcome is not bedlam, total confusion and chaos, but rather a reasonable approximation of order. This order permits each individual to pursue his personal course without too seriously interfering with the pursuit by others of their purposes and goals. Indeed, this order generally assures that each can actually facilitate to some degree the attainment by others of their goals. The prime object of sociology is to explain how this comes about, how some reasonable degree of coordination of so many diverse individual actions yields the routine flow of social life. When we say that there is a social system, we refer to the coordination and integration of social acts which permit them to occur in a way that produces order rather than chaos.

Since our emphasis on order may be so easily misunderstood, we hasten to add early and emphatically that to delineate the nature of the social order is not necessarily to approve or justify it. A totalitarian government also develops a social order. A sociologist who studies it may explain the role of the monolithic party in monopolizing political power. He may show how the media of mass communication are used to mobilize public opinion and to manufacture the appearance of consensus, or expose the role which secret-police terror plays in permitting the elite to effect social control. In so doing,

[15] See Chap. 5 for definitions and discussions of the terms social act and society.

he obviously is not justifying, excusing, nor indeed in any necessary way judging the social order with which he deals. The sociologist may certainly be stimulated by his own values to explore and to emphasize one rather than another problem within such a system. In doing the job of analysis, he is also giving those of us not familiar with the system a basis on which we can form our own moral and political judgment. But such judgment should not be confused with the separate task of describing the basic order by which, for good or ill, a particular social system is kept in operation.

The sociologist's concern with the *problem* of order should not lead one to assume that he has no interest in or responsibility for studying manifestations of disorder. No social system functions flawlessly, regardless of the perspective from which it is viewed. Certainly no social system is perfect from the point of view of all its members. It is endemic in social life that some norms will not be met, some values not fulfilled, some goals not attained. Indeed, in any society, there may be some important realms in which the *majority* violate the socially or legally defined standard, and often at great cost of life. A trip along any of the highways of the United States during the Labor Day weekend will suffice to make the point. Almost all societies know periods, often long ones, of riot, civil war, mob violence, terror, crime, and general disorganization. Each of these manifestations is a departure from some social order already established or, as in case of counter-revolution, one seeking to establish itself. And even disorder is not necessarily chaos.

Within both individual and collective life there are "natural" forces making for order and stability and other equally "natural" forces making for disorder, conflict, and disruption. The balance between these forces may be very different at different times. It is a matter of preference, of personal inclination or philosophic orientation, whether you choose to see the world as a place inherently in a state of disorder struggling to achieve some order, or as normally in a condition of order but subject to constant disruption and the threat of disorder. For myself, I am quite satisfied that it fits the existing facts better, and is more conducive to effective analysis, to assume order as man's basic condition. To make this assumption is very far from passing on the importance of studying man's frequent and important plunges into a state of relative disorder. I stress "relative," because without some order, even within conditions of seeming general disorder, man would cease to survive. Some societies persistently failed to solve the problem of maintaining order, and have dissolved, their members scattered, absorbed elsewhere, or totally vanished. But always there has been another social system in which order prevailed and social man survived.

A sociology which completely ignores the manifestations of disorder in social life is clearly an incomplete and inadequate sociology. No less may be said of one which denies the basic facts of social order and turns its back on the mechanisms which insure it, concerning itself exclusively with the problems of social disorganization. The conflict between those who hold out for an "equilibrium theory" and those who urge us to adopt a "conflict theory" of society is sterile,[16] since a complete sociology must include both the study of order and disorder, and also of orderly and disorderly *change*. Arnold Feldman and Wilbert Moore urge on us the more dynamic, inclusive conception of society as a "tension management system."

"The 'order' characteristic of any social system thus consists of both regularized patterns of action and institutions that control, ameliorate, or

[16] These conceptions of society and their protagonists are discussed in Chap. 3.