

**THE FUNCTION OF  
SOCIALIZATION IN  
SOCIAL EVOLUTION; A  
DISSERTATION**

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The function of socialization in social evolution; a dissertation by Ernest W. Burgess

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**ERNEST W. BURGESS**

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SOCIALIZATION IN  
SOCIAL EVOLUTION; A  
DISSERTATION**



**The University of Chicago**

**THE FUNCTION OF SOCIALIZATION  
IN SOCIAL EVOLUTION**

**A DISSERTATION**

**SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS  
AND LITERATURE IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE  
OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
(DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY)**

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**BY  
ERNEST W. BURGESS**

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## PREFACE

The factors in social evolution are reducible to three: geography, heredity, and socialization. Anthropogeographers have assembled the evidence for the influence upon man of his physical environment. Students in biology, and in ethnology and psychology as well, have stressed the importance in social progress of individual and racial characteristics, both organic and mental. The sociologist, on the other hand, has pointed out the limitations of these explanations of human development: first, because each tends to disregard the facts brought forward by the other, and secondly, because both ignore the part played by socialization.

The thesis of this essay is that socialization, rather than either geography or heredity, is the dominant factor in social evolution. The evidence for this position is presented in the study of the factors involved in discovery and invention, in social progress, and in personal development.

My obligations to those who have studied this problem are indicated only in part by the references in the text and the footnotes. To Albion W. Small I owe the stimulus to persevere to the completion of this work and the suggestion to select the history of the English people for the analysis of the rôle of socialization in social progress. The teaching and writings of William I. Thomas, George E. Vincent, Charles H. Cooley, George H. Mead, Charles A. Ellwood, and James R. Angell have been especially helpful in the development of the social psychological standpoint for the interpretation of the process of socialization. The delay between writing and publication is responsible for the absence of reference to Wallas' *The Great Society* and to Ellwood's *The Social Problem*. My greatest indebtedness is to my sister for her constant assistance in all parts of the preparation of this study.

E. W. B.

## INTRODUCTION

There exists a more or less sharp division among sociologists with reference to the nature of socialization and its function in human progress. Small postulates purpose as the dynamic factor in society, and perceives in the evolution of human values the central process in human evolution. Ward, on the contrary, sees in man's progressive control over nature the dominant factor in spiritual as well as in material civilization. A statement of this latter position and its criticism by Professor Small will be sufficient to exhibit the antithesis between the two conceptions:

"To repeat again the definition that I formulated twenty years ago: *material civilization consists in the utilization of the materials and forces of nature.* It is, however, becoming more and more apparent that the spiritual part of civilization is at least conditioned upon material civilization. It does not derogate from its worth to admit that without a material basis it cannot exist. But it is also true that the moment such a basis is supplied, it comes forth in all ages and races of men. It may therefore be regarded as innate in man and potential everywhere, but a flower so delicate that it can only bloom in the rich soil of material prosperity. As such it does not need to be specially fostered. No amount of care devoted to it alone could make it flourish in the absence of suitable conditions, and with such conditions it requires no special attention. It may therefore be dismissed from our considerations, and our interest may be centered in the question of material civilization, and this will be understood without the use of the adjective."<sup>1</sup>

The criticism is brief, but to the point:

"This is partly optical illusion which overlooks the tremendous labors that men have always had to put forth to procure spiritual progress after the material means were supplied; and it is partly the same mistake in theory which marks the most vulnerable point in *Dynamic Sociology*. I have called it the drop-a-nickel-in-the-slot conception of the social process—the idea that 'information' passes automatically through the steps of the psychological series and de-

<sup>1</sup>*Pure Sociology*, 1903, p. 18.



posits 'happiness' in its owner's cup. The amount of technical effort that has been expended on the spiritual contents of civilization, which Ward refers to as a spontaneous growth, is curiously underestimated in this passage."<sup>2</sup>

The primary object of this thesis is not to elaborate a critique of Ward's conception of the nature of socialization and its function in human progress, for it is only fair to state that he does not consistently hold to the view expressed here. Our purpose is rather to utilize these conflicting statements as the point of departure in an attempt to interpret the function of socialization in the social process. The following points, implicit or explicit, in the passage quoted from Ward, may serve as a foil to the succeeding discussion:

*That material invention is independent of socialization.*—We shall attempt to indicate to what extent scientific discovery and mechanical invention are conditioned by the process of socialization.

*That spiritual civilization is conditioned by material civilization.*—Our aim is to give a qualitative account of the factors, apart from the material influences, that determine social evolution.

*That spiritual civilization needs no special attention.*—We shall endeavor to point out that the ongoing of civilization, both spiritually and materially, is increasingly dependent upon the socializing of the individual. Moreover, we hope to make evident the inadequacy of a program which is limited to the diffusion of knowledge alone for the socialization of the individual and the promotion of progress.

Socialization<sup>3</sup> may be studied from two aspects. From the standpoint of the group, we may define it as the psychic articulation of the individual into the collective activities. From the standpoint of the person, socialization is the participation of the individual in the spirit and purpose, knowledge and methods, decision and action of the group.

<sup>2</sup> "Note on Ward's 'Pure Sociology,' II," in the *American Journal of Sociology*, IX (1903-4), 569.

<sup>3</sup>This definition emphasizes the process rather than the product of the process. Compare with Giddings' definition, "Socialization . . . is the development of a social nature or character—a social state of mind—in the individuals who associate" (*Theory of Socialization*, 1897, p. 2). Ward uses the term "socialization" in a more restricted sense: "Socialization is conscious, intentional, wished for, and welcomed telic action; not of the individual as such, but of those individuals into whose hands society, by whatever means, intrusts the conduct of its affairs" (*op. cit.*, p. 547).

With this tentative definition of socialization, we proceed to a statement of the propositions to be maintained in defense of the thesis:

1. Socialization is an indispensable condition to mechanical invention and scientific discovery upon which material civilization depends. In this way the evolution of human wants is as much a factor in social evolution as the evolution of the technique of the control of nature.

2. Socialization is not static, nor absolute, but dynamic and functional with reference to the promotion of the group activities. The psychic interactions of persons in the group give rise to mental attitudes which determine the direction and rate of social progress.

3. The socialization of the individual is not complete with the education of the intellect, but involves the refinement of the feelings and the discipline of the will in the achievement of self-control so that the individual consciously modifies his behavior and shapes his purposes to promote more efficient co-operative activity and to realize the higher welfare of the group.

