Society: The Idea and its Sources

by Edward Shils

I. The Idea

A society — a human society — is a differentiated and coordinated system of the institutionalized and freely adaptive actions of individuals, self-reproductive through time and taking place within a territory which has meaning to those who reside in it.

1. *Territoriality:* The boundaries of this territory differ in determinateness from society to society. Regardless of their definiteness, they set a general limit to the range of membership in the society. This helps to form the individual's image of himself as a member of his society, and his image of his fellow-members.

2. *Continuity:* (a. *Genetic*) Any system which we call a society has a prolonged persistence through time. It is primarily self-reproducing biologically and hence at any one time contains individuals at all stages of the human life span. Although new members may be recruited through immigration or through the extension of the boundaries of the territory in which the society lives, these new members are incorporated into the *self-reproductive* stock of the society. It is the latter fact which helps to constitute them as members. (b. *Traditional)* A society also has continuity through time by virtue of the trans-generational persistence of certain modes of the organization of action and belief. This inheritance in the form of tradition is often accompanied by a feature which is unique to human societies. This is the

sense of continuity with the past. It is an attachment to the past, a sense of participation in the past as well as the present, and it is experienced by some significant sectors of practically all known societies.

3. *Institutions:* (a. *Interaction*) A society is constituted by the actions of individual actors acting towards other individual actors whom they confront immediately or through communication over a greater distance An essential element in this interactive confrontation is the *normative expectation* directed by one of the actors towards the other. These normative expectations vary in explicitness and in imperativeness. Conformity with them calls forth rewards in the form of positive response (e.g., affection, praise, etc.) and/or the provision of facilities such as income, and other claims to resources such as land, vocational roles etc. Nonconformity calls forth negative responses (hostility, disapproval, etc.) and/or withdrawal or blocking of access to income and other claims to resources, etc.

Interactive relationships, and whole societies, vary in the degree of specificity and imperativeness of these normative expectations. The lower the degree of specificity and imperativeness, the greater the range of freedom of the individual actor.

(b. *Scarcity*) Every human situation contains within it the potentiality, if not the immediate reality, of scarcity of the objects which correspond to the ends sought by the human beings in that situation. Scarcity is therefore a potential problem whenever human beings come into contact with each other. It does not become an urgent problem when normative expectations are shared, since the allocation of scarce rewards in relationship to the properties of the actors constitutes one of the main substantive elements of any normative expectation.

The allocation of facilities for enjoyment and performance is another of the "problems" to which normative expectations are addressed. Claims and rights to such facilities are regulated by these expectations. Where normative expectations are not effectively shared, and where they inadequately

cover newly emergent problems of the allocation of facilities and rewards, scarcity, and therewith conflict, emerge as real problems.

(c. *Conflict*) When conformity with expectations is not forthcoming, the result is either withdrawal of the particular actors from the relationship and their replacement in it by others, the cessation of the relationship, the continuation of the relationship in a less integrated form, or conflict in which the actors seek to achieve their own ends over each other's resistance.

(d. *Order*) When the normative expectations are shared by the parties to the interactive relationship, the result is order; when this order is stable and recurrent through time, it is an institution. The institutional order of a society has, as a whole, considerable resistance to exogenous change. The breakdown of institutional order in cases of revolution, civil war, and interpersonal violence is usually restricted to a certain range by the existence of other shared normative expectations which institutionalize the conflict of aspirations. Order never collapses completely and concurrently in all spheres and areas. Even the most violent internal conflicts are surrounded by elements of institutional order.

(e. *Value-orientations*) The normative expectations which are central in the interaction of individual actors are expressions of the general value-orientations of the actors. The value-orientations are expressed in the judgments of individuals regarding what action is appropriate for an individual characterized by certain properties such as age, sex, occupational role, past or prospective achievement, power position, kinship and ethnic connections, civil membership, etc., in a given situation. They contain a usually very vague and not necessarily consistent scheme of ranking or ordering of virtues or merits, and of the rewards to which their bearers are entitled.

(f. *Status and role*) The actions of individuals, even in face-to-face, interactive situations, are not therefore directed to the other individuals in the situation solely as individuals. They are directed rather towards them with respect to their

possession of these diverse properties. The normative expectations which an individual actor directs towards other individuals need not be an expression of his own personal predispositions but might be those which are appropriate to his own role (as defined by certain properties, e.g., occupation). Thus, a civil servant, dealing, in a matter of public business, with another individual, will express a value-orientation which is appropriate to a civil servant in relation to a citizen, rather than his own personal value-orientation or temperamental disposition.

The orientation of action of an individual is hence not always towards another particular individual. It may also be towards a *class* of individuals possessing certain properties, such as ethnic qualities, occupation, income or power.

In consequence of the inherent generality of the component elements in normative expectations, a society comprises not only interactive relationships of individuals but also relationships of anonymous *classes* of individuals, each class defined by its generic properties (e.g., race, class, power position).

(g. *Structural differentiation*) The actions which the members of the society perform towards each other, towards nature, towards cultural symbols and towards members of societies outside their own, are differentiated into institutionalized sub-systems—into families, churches, schools and universities, workshops, markets, corporations, armies, etc., which perform diverse and overlapping functions for their individual members and for the maintenance and change of the society.

These institutions possess certain self-reproductive properties which enable them to persist through time, to adapt themselves to changes, to recruit new members and to assimilate them into their ways of acting and judging. Their persistence and internal coherence rest in the first instance on a certain measure of sharing of value-orientations, or, more specifically, of sharing of normative expectations, and on their capacity to gratify the needs of their members within the institution and in their relationships to the society and the world outside the institution.

4. *Attachment:* Institutions, and the corporate bodies which define their boundaries, are kept stable through power, through expectations of advantage, by the consensual legitimacy of the rules and authority in the institution, and by the attachments of the members towards each other. These attachments are of four types: *Primordial*, *personal*, *sacred*, and *civil*.

(a. *Primordial*) An attachment to a person by virtue of particularistic existential connections, such as a biological tie of kinship, or an enduring sexual connection, or the sharing of a common location on the earth's surface, is a primordial attachment. The vital and chthonic aspects of an individual human being's existence arouse his sensibilities on occasion, and this aroused sensitivity causes him to apprehend his connection with those who share them with him. Kinship, ethnic identity, and nationality all have their roots in these primordial reactions.

(b. *Personal*) Human beings are capable of individuality and of the perception of another's individuality. The purely personal qualities of gentleness, benevolence, lovingness, cruelty, resentment, harshness, etc., go forth from one individual to another and arouse personal attachments (and repugnances). In institutional roles, where the normative expectations call for judgments and actions quite independently of personal qualities, these qualities still force their way through to expressions of attachment (or repugnance).

(c. *Sacred*) Human beings in various degrees and on particular occasions have a sense of confronting some ultimate ground of being, some irreducible force, such as divinity, justice, truth or goodness. These perceptions of the "sacred" become articulated into systems of belief, in which individuals in any society share in unequal measures. For those for whom these beliefs are urgent, other individuals who share these beliefs are endowed with a quality which calls forth a particular attachment. The community of believers is a community in which the members who themselves are possessed by sacredness are attached to each other by virtue of their belief in a common relationship to the sacred.

(d. *Civil*) When primordial and sacred sensibilities are moderate, and when the attachments to which they give rise become more attenuated, a general normative expectation of civility emerges. This is the obligation of citizenship corresponding to membership in a civil society: The elements of territoriality and of justice, which are respectively primordial and sacred in their origin, persist in the normative expectation of civility; but they become less exclusive and less preponderant and permit a greater looseness and plurality of attachment.

5. *Polity; Economy; Culture; Kinship; Status:* The major institutional sub-systems of any society are its polity, its economy, its system of cultural institutions, its kinship or familial system, and its status system. Very approximately, the sub-systems exist because they gratify the needs of human beings. The needs for stability, order and justice, not merely in their face-to-face interaction but in the larger order of which they feel themselves part, are coped with by the polity; the needs for sustenance, shelter and convenience, by the economy; and the needs for instrumental and sacred knowledge, aesthetic expression and reception, and moral judgment, by the cultural system. The needs for sexual gratification, genetic continuity, affection and convenience are expressed in the kinship system. The status system arises from men's propensity to judge themselves and others in accordance with their value-orientations. This attribution of needs to the sub-systems is, it should be stressed, at best only approximate. Some of the needs are gratified less specifically throughout several of the sub-systems.

Each of these institutional sub-systems does not merely gratify needs. It provides the rules which govern the conditions of their gratification. It allocates scarce occasions and scarce facilities for their gratification. The allocations are practically always unequal in some measure among the members of the sub-system. The inequality might be a function of the unequal distribution of genetic properties, or of the unequal distribution of power, of significant kinship connections, skill, education, etc. Existing distributions of inequality of one property often reinforce inequalities in the distribution of other properties as facilities and rewards. These inequalities consti-

tute "problems" in the most elementary interactive process and in the society as a whole. Within each sub-system, coping with this problem of inequality in the distribution of occasions, facilities and rewards is a major task. Its solution determines the state of equilibrium of the sub-system, and through the linkage with other sub-systems, it affects their equilibrium also.

These spheres or sub-systems of institutions must be integrated in some way, because the same individuals participate in each of them. The sub-systems are linked with each other in a variety of ways. In small, "primitive" societies, they are almost congruous with each other; i.e., the same persons perform roles which are simultaneously political and economic and familial, or political and cultural, or cultural and economic, or economic and familial. These societies are often called "undifferentiated" because of the approximation of the sub-systems towards identity of personnel and fusion of roles.

The larger a society becomes and the more complex the tasks become, the more the sub-systems or spheres tend towards differentiation. Naturally, the same individuals participate in all of them, but there is less "carry-over" of roles from one to the other. Thus, when a family member acts in his capacity as a churchman or as a teacher in a school, his familial status is in suspension. The economy and the polity become distinct from each other, the kinship system and the cultural system become distinct from each other, etc. Within the cultural sphere, the religious roles become distinct from the scientific, and these respectively become distinct from the aesthetic roles.

Each of these sub-systems develops a certain measure of autonomy, but this autonomy is always limited by the functioning of the other sub-systems. They intersect at many points: through overlapping personnel, e.g., the family and the economy; or through dependence for financial support, e.g., the polity in relation to scientific institutions; or through the provision of a framework of authoritative rules which set limits to the range of variability of the autonomously established and enforced rules of the particular sub-system, e.g.,

the polity in relation to the market economy, or the polity in relation to the family. The status sub-system is very intimately linked with the others because the judgments which determine the status of an individual or group refer to their possession of such properties as income, wealth, occupation, achievement, education, family connections, ethnicity, power, etc., which are themselves foci of institutional sub-systems.

6. *Co-ordination:* The co-ordination of individual actions and of institutions is accomplished through *consensus*, i.e., shared or common symbols which define the objectives and rules of action, through the *exercise of power*, through *exchange*, and through *ecological adaptation*. These four main types of the co-ordination of individual action—consensus, power, exchange, and ecological adaptation—are almost always intertwined in varying combinations. The pure type is found in reality only occasionally and marginally.

(a. *Power*) In so far as the exercise of power works within the consensus, the relevant actions of individuals, i.e., their obedience to the commands of the powerful, are co-ordinated by (legitimate) authority. In so far as the co-ordination takes place through the capacity of the powerful person to withdraw or grant some object or opportunity greatly desired by the person to whom his particular or general, explicit or implicit, commands are directed, he rules by coercion. (Manipulation is a further variant in which the situation is so managed that conformity with the intentions of the powerful is obtained without the expression of a command and without the perception, on the part of the conforming person, of an intention to elicit obedience.)

(b. *Exchange*) Co-ordination also takes place through exchange of prospectively advantageous objects or services. Exchange takes place within a context of generally agreed rules, such as the relative value of the objects and services exchanged etc. Failure to conform with these rules might result in the dissolution of the relationship by the withdrawal of one of the parties or through the enforcement of the rule by a third party possessing acknowledged legitimacy (e.g., the state).

(c. *Ecological adaptation*) Co-ordination is often brought

about, not through the direct expression of a normative expectation and explicit conformity with it, but through independently initiated adaptive action. Individual actors, confronting a situation which they accept as given, i.e., as unchangeable by their own action, will often modify or adapt their actions so as to obtain from it the gratifications they seek —at least in some measure. Thus, as new employment opportunities arise in new areas of a country, individuals will change their residences; as the demand for old skills declines, they will cultivate new skills. These latter changes do not take place because any powerful person has ordered or even desired them to occur. They occur because the actor sees in his adaptation some relative advantage as compared with the alternative of persisting in a course of action which might be relatively disadvantageous to him.

(d. *Consensus*) A society which is a relatively stable, recurrent system of actions, differentiated into institutional spheres and particular institutions, is inconceivable without some degree of consensus among those participating in each process of interaction, and within the society as a whole. For the mutually gratifying and successful interaction between individuals in communication with each other, which constitutes the most elementary pattern of every institution, some mutual understanding and tacit and explicit agreement are necessary. This is so whether the relationship be one of authority and obedience or one of exchange. (This does not mean that there are no interactions in which the prospect or reality of coercion renders the process "successful" from the standpoint of one of the actors. There is always some coercion in every society. It is, however, seldom preponderant for a long period or over a very wide range of the interactive processes occurring in the society at any one time.)

This mutual understanding and agreement are the manifestations of the common possession of and attachment to a set of symbols which range from vocabularies to moral rules and cosmic beliefs. The symbols which regulate a particular interaction of persons, face-to-face or otherwise in communication with each other, are part of a wider cosmos of symbols

which many persons share in that society to varying degrees and in various situations of interaction.

None of the symbols of the constellation are continuously in effective operation. Most of them are in the "latent stock," available when the occasion arises. Only a small part of the cosmos of symbols which constitutes the cultural system of a society is explicit. Little of it is systematized in an articulate and rigourously logical pattern, and by no means all of it is equally shared by all the members of the society.

It is, for one thing, not shared by the infants and children of the society. They come into the world without it, and much of the process of their education is concerned with inculcating some rudiments of it into them (*socialization.*) It is not equally shared by all adults because of inequalities in the strength of their need to be in possession of or in contact with the cosmos of symbolic objects. It is not equally shared by persons who live spatially or socially distant from the "center" of the society, who are not effectively in communication with those in the society, who have taken the "central value system" into their particular custody (e.g., judges, lawyers, professors, theologians, etc.). It is not equally shared by those who are long established in the society and those who are new to it and who have not been "assimilated" (e.g., immigrants). It is not equally shared by those who define their "interests" as being contrary to the "interests" of those who are in authority in the central institutional system of the society (e.g., churches, state, economic enterprises, universities, etc.). It is not equally shared by those who follow criminal careers, or who are consciously revolutionary or otherwise antinomian.

Nonetheless, despite these marked inequalities in possession and attachment to the cosmos of the society, there is something which approximates, in a discontinuous and partial form, a consensus which, in consequence of its existence, restricts conflict and sustains order. The cultural system integrates those who share it.

7. *Central Value and Institutional Systems:* Societies, although they are defined by the co-ordinated actions of individuals, which are in their turn co-ordinated into institutions

and spheres, are not, however, equally integrated. No society can ever be a completely integral structure. It is impossible that all its members will be equal in attachment to the cosmos of cultural values, or that they will be equally integrated into the structure of institutions which embody these values. There is a close association between the espousal of the cultural value system and the exercise of authority in the institutional system. The institutions through which the main authority is exercised in the co-ordination of a society constitute the central institutional system (e.g., state, church, the legal system, including especially the property system, schools and universities). The value system expressed by the elites of this institutional system is the central value system.

The expanse of territory and the consequent imperfections of communication (even in present-day Western societies), the differentiation of occupational roles in the economy, and the differentiation of styles of life attendant on the inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth, all lead diverse sectors of societies to be unequally attached to the central value system and to participate unequally in the central institutional system. Participation in the rule-making and decision-making functions of the polity is certainly very unequal, even in democracy. Integration into a single economy is imperfect, even in a planned economy, because of difficulties in planning and administration on a grand scale. Participation in religious institutions is unequal. Commercial and cultural intercourse frequently leave pockets of isolation in the countryside and even in sections of great metropolitan centers where groups of people lead more or less self-contained lives.

The integration of societies falls short of completeness not only in the form of isolated self-containment, but also in the forms of alienation, withdrawal and conflict. These involve both hostility, in varying degrees, to significant parts of the constellation of cultural symbols, and refusal to accept the roles commanded by authority in particular institutional subsystems or spheres.

Moreover, it is not merely that there is imperfect integration between the "center" and the "periphery" of any society. Within the center, among the elites of the different spheres,

there is always some measure of un-integratedness. The economic elites, for example, are not always completely in accord among themselves, and they might well be in conflict with the political elites or the cultural elites. And these two latter categories are also often in discord, internally and externally.

8. *Transformation:* No society remains very long what it has been at any moment of its past. Every society, although continuity and stable recurrence are essential to its being, is continuously in change. The changes are of varying magnitudes, and the magnitudes or "rates" of change vary among different sub-systems and within the spheres as well; the rates also vary through time.

The internal tensions of a society, associated with its mal-integration, are one major source of instigation of these changes. The un-integratedness of the cultural value system is another major source, since efforts to explore, clarify and systematize, bring forth new potentialities and discredit older claims to validity of institutions and actions legitimated by the antecedent interpretations. There is, moreover, in some men a need for novelty. Furthermore, in some societies—and most notably in Western societies, where science plays such a central role in the system of cultural values—the cultivation of certain types of cultural values is a guarantee of continuous innovation. This is accentuated in societies where "efficiency" becomes one of the cultural standards by which institutions and practices are judged.

II. The Sources

The idea of society which is sketchily presented in the foregoing pages is neither an arbitrary nor an idiosyncratic composition. The divers components belong together, not simply in an empirical sense, but rather in the sense that they are entailed in the opening sentence. Neither are the underlying conceptions or the specific components of this definition idiosyncratic.

In the present state of reflection on the nature of society, this definition represents a consensus which is, in varying degrees of explicitness, accepted among the leading writers on the subject, among whom might be mentioned Professor Tal-

cott Parsons, Professor Frank H. Knight, M. Bertrand de Jouvenel, Professor Raymond Aron, Professor Max Gluckman, Professor Michal Polanyi, Professor Helmuth Plessner, *et al.* Naturally, not all, and perhaps none, of the writers would subscribe to every aspect of the conception of society set forth above. Nonetheless, there is a fundamental identity of outlook among these leading social theorists of the present period, and the conception expounded in this paper attempts to give one expression to that identity.

Another ground for refuting a possible charge of idiosyncracy in this conception of society is the complex set of traditions upon which it draws. It is obviously impossible on this occasion to write the history of each element; it is, however, possible to indicate briefly the main sources from which most of these elements derive. Their major points of contact with the past reach into the essential traditions of our intellectual history in the West.

1. *Territoriality:* Much, naturally, goes back to Aristotle. The idea of the territorial basis of a society received its most enduring form in his depictions of the *polis*. The Aristotelian notion of the territorial aspect of the *polis* was enriched by Ferdinand Tönnies, who in *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* built directly on Aristotle's idea of territoriality to formulate one of the essential properties of *Gemeinschaft*. According to Tönnies, the soil on which the *Gemeinschaft*—the small closely knit society, e.g., a village community—lives, acquires symbolic value, even sacredness, so that residence on it and contact with it become qualifications for membership in the collectivity. Quite independently of Tönnies, Jane Harrison's and Ernst Renan's analyses of sacred places extended the Aristotelian conception; the ideas of the 19th- and early 20th-century theorists of nationalism also contributed to the reinterpretation of territoriality, as a merely spatial location of a society, into the conception of territorial locus as a "meaningful" aspect of social life, whereby individuals define the scope of their obligations and the identity of themselves and others.

2. *Continuity:* Aristotle—with Plato—is also the source of the idea of the biological continuity of any society. Society must continue the institutions which provide for its biological

continuation—otherwise it would not be a society. There are institutions or collectivities which are not biologically reproducing, such as clubs, armies, universities, etc., but that is why they are only components of society and not societies as such. (That is why definitions of society which bring forth only the nature of the social bond as the defining criterion are inadequate.) This concern with biological self-reproduction as one essential criterion of a society which distinguishes it from its component parts was taken up again in the 18th century by writers like Adam Ferguson, who could be said to be one of the forerunners of the analysis of kinship and kinship-dominated societies. Malthus, although his interest in kinship was of quite another order, helped to fix the attention of social theorists on the family as the institution through which the genetic reproduction of the society takes place. After Malthus, the Darwinian and Spencerian influences imprinted this awareness even more firmly on thought about society.

The main result of this series of influences is that our idea of society is forced to acknowledge a temporal dimension—not in the sense of historicists and those who would dissolve the theory of society into social history, but in the sense that the very definition of society must refer to its trans-generational nature.

This in turn has forced attention to the mechanisms by which a genetically continuous sequence of new generations maintains a continuity of practices and beliefs. Here the inspiration is almost entirely modern. German Romanticism is the single greatest influence. The linguistic studies which were associated with it presented to scholars the picture of a constellation of symbols persisting over long periods of time and undergoing gradual modifications—so gradual that they were imperceptible to those who experienced them. The parallel interest in the customs and usages of the peasantry and the collection of folklore and folksongs presented students of society with a collection of materials about cultural products which had persisted over a long period. These two scholarly achievements gave birth, under the impact of Hegelianism, to folk psychology which sought to account for the genesis of these cultural products by the laws of the "folk-soul." The

adaptation of these problems to a more individualistic intellectual environment was accomplished by Walter Bagehot in *Physics and Politics*. There the matter has rested, through numerous ethnographic and folkloristic enquiries; but the forms and mechanisms of transmission still remain unelucidated.

There is, however, one exception to this stand-still. This is the discovery of "socialization" as a major mechanism of continuity. The Platonic and Aristotelian concern with education had never faded from intellectual consciousness. It was only the development of child psychology at the beginning of the 20th century, and particularly John Dewey's educational ideas and Freud's notions about the process of the formation of the super-ego through incorporation, which permitted a somewhat more differentiated mapping of one particular process of transmission.

3. *Institutions:* The general idea of an institution comes from Roman law, but the process of the analysis of the elements of an institution has received little guidance from that source. The idea of interaction among individuals developed only rather late, receiving its most pregnant formulations in the writings of J. Mark Baldwin and George Herbert Mead, who were much influenced by Darwin's ideas on the expression of emotion in animals. A parallel source is the development, in German idealism and British empiricism of the 18th and 19th centuries, of the problem of how one human mind comes to know the contents of other minds. Simmel's definition of society as "interaction" brought these latter traditions to the attention of sociologists and prepared the way for a fusion of Darwinian and American behaviorist ideas with those which stemmed from British and German philosophy.

Thomas Hobbes ranks with Aristotle as one of the greatest of the progenitors of modern thought about society. Hobbes's conception of the state of nature as a condition of scarcity went through various phases until it reached formulation in modern economic theory. But before that, it left a powerful impression on 18th- and 19th-century utilitarianism. The fundamental utilitarian view of society as an arena of "conflicting interests" and of the mechanisms whereby these conflicting

interests are harmonized, compromised or fused, is perhaps the most crucial contribution to the understanding of modern society. The task of accounting for the existence of order in society, in the face of the permanently present possibility of conflicts over the allocation of scarce values, is of prime importance in the conception of society presented here. This way of viewing society represents an effort to resolve the problem posed by Hobbes's conception of the state of nature. Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, Thomas Malthus, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber have all applied themselves to the Hobbesian problem—and all subsequent sociological thought may be said to have its origins in this problem.

The treatment of conflict is older than Hobbes, and historically it has received its most trenchant descriptions in Thucydides, Tacitus and Sallust. Guicciardini and the political historians and theorists of the Italian city-states kept vividly alive the image of man in perpetual state of conflict. The analytical conception of conflict which has had the deepest impact on the modern conception of society derives, however, from Hobbes. The efforts to treat the forms and conditions of conflict on a more general plane were in suspension until the Darwinian writers took up the problem, in the second half of the 19th century, following the lead of Malthus. From the Darwinians, a line leads to Simmel who, on the one side, tried to formulate a general analytical scheme of conflict in general and its varieties, and Freud, who, on the other, propounded a dynamic biologically rooted theory of the genesis of conflict within and among human beings.

The conception of an order which emerges from shared value-orientations is already contained in Aristotle's analysis of the genesis of revolutions in the divergent conception of justice within a society. The Rousseauist conception of a common will brought, into the center of the analysis, a trans-individual shared outlook as the basis of order. Although it was not formulated in individualistic categories and hence not integrated with the present scheme of interaction—which is individualistic, at least in a methodological sense—it has nonetheless provided the intellectual tradition from which our present conception of systems of value-orientations has

come. Dilthey's distinction between the meaningful and the causal in the motivation of conduct, and his criticism of empirical psychology, helped to indicate components of individual action which had some intimate connection with the objective spirit, with the realm of collectively shared but objectively existing symbols. The idealistic conception of culture in the German *Geisteswissenschaften*—a conception which stressed the realities of the objective spirit and its emanations in works of art, science, religion, etc.—stood in sharp contrast with the individualism of British economic and ethical thought. Emile Durkheim and Max Weber sought to bridge this gap and were partially successful. In any case, our present-day conception of society sees the value-orientations of individuals as part of a more widely shared constellation of value-orientations. It has not yet been wholly successful in fusing the motivational conceptions derived from an individualistic psychology with the categories of a *geisteswissenschaftliche* psychology. This is one of the gaps in our definition and in the contemporary definition of society.

Our conception of status and role go back, as do many of our ideas in related matters, to Plato and Aristotle. The assessment of human beings in accordance with their personal qualities, their skills and their kinship connections makes up a significant part of our tradition. The status element in individual interaction, which was equally prominent in classical writings on ethics and friendship, found renewal in the writings of French moralists and English character writers of the 17th century. These classical conceptions of the properties of different types of men were reshaped into the depiction of the moral outlooks of the various strata of society carried out in the work of the Scottish social philosophers of the 18th century. The German ideas regarding the status system of society, with their emphasis on strata with diverse conceptions of rights and obligations, go back to the *Republic* and to Aristotle's *Ethics*.

4. *Polity, Economy, etc.:* Before the theoretical analysis of the structural differentiation could appear, it had to be preceded by the analysis of particular institutions. This has been largely the work of the 19th century and above all of

the historical outlook which was engendered by Romanticism. The study of legal institutions of property, inheritance, kinship, forms of economic organization, of the history of universities, of states and administrative bodies—although there was a substantial accomplishment prior to the 19th century—flowered only in that century. German Romanticism, with its stress on immanent development, played a great role. Just as the inherent potentialities of development were discovered in the study of languages, so, in the development of legal institutions, and in the study of village communities, were observed in juxtaposition with the forces making for development and change in response to internal and external pressure self-reproducing and self-integrating processes.

These studies were the fruit of the vast growth of historical research in the 19th century. Economic history in Germany, France and Britain, constitutional, legal and administrative history, studies of the *ethos*, of customs and usages and of kinship systems, were all among the greatest achievements of the 19th century in the West. Social and cultural anthropology, constitutional law and jurisprudence prospered. Except, however, for economic theory in Britain and in Austria and, to a lesser extent, in Italy in the latter part of the 19th century, the more analytical studies did not fare equally well. The influence of the evolutionary outlook was too profound; in consequence of its preponderance, both theoretical and concrete studies sought to demonstrate an evolutionary sequence. A more general analytic approach was put into the shadows.

5. *Co-ordination:* For this reason, the 19th century, which was so rich in the promulgation of important conceptions and so productive in scholarship, did not make comparable progress in the analytical understanding of the basic processes linking the various institutional spheres. To the analytical understanding of power, for example, the 19th century added very little to the Machiavellian and Hobbesian inheritance, which had in their turn added so much to the inheritance from Aristotle, Tacitus, *et al.* The greatest 20th-century students of power, Max Weber and Pareto, have both gone back to antiquity and the 16th and 17th centuries. Karl Marx was the most important contributor to the study of power in the

19th century, but he dealt less with power as we understand it now than with what we have called ecological adaptation, which was more congenial to that intellectual atmosphere generated by Malthus and Darwin as a variation on the Hobbesian theme of scarcity.

Whereas the 18th and 19th centuries contributed little to the analysis of power, they added mightily to our appreciation of exchange and ecological adaptation as forms of co-ordination. Indeed, it might well be said that the discovery of the impersonal market as a mechanism of co-ordination was one of the few great discoveries in the history of social thought, to be placed alongside the Aristotelian idea of man as a political animal, the Roman idea of citizenship, the Machiavellian and Hobbesian ideas about the nature and functions of power, and the German idea of the "objective spirit."

The notion of a consensus of beliefs which binds society together, which prevents its members from pursuing divergent and conflicting ends of action, is again Platonic and Aristotelian in its inspiration. Its indispensability for social order, and the need to construct it through deliberately cultivated myths, through education, and through manipulation, remain a major theme of all Western thought. The Aristotelian analysis of the centrality of consensus about the justice of a given order of distribution undergoes no sociologically influential development until the emergence of the Rouseauist conception of the general will. Neither in the common will nor in the ensuing German variants was there a clear portrayal of the way in which the individual participated in these trans-individual symbolic formations. But the powerful persuasiveness of the idealistic political and cultural philosophy created, among those who shared a more individualistic tradition, the awareness that something like what the idealists averred must have some correspondence in their own image of society. The notion of the intrinsic value of a trans-individual collectivity, not just as an instrument for individual ends but as a good in itself, the notion of the individual's conception of himself as a part of a more comprehensive social and political entity, and of his attachment to other persons in their extra-individual capacities—al-

though already available retrospectively in the classics—were brought into the consciousness of modern social theorists through their long emphasis and elaboration in the thought of German idealism.

6. *Attachment:* In the 19th century, there was one writer in whom the Aristotelian, the German idealist, and the Hobbesian traditions came together in the most vivid form: he was Ferdinand Tönnies. Other writers, like Weber and Durkheim, achieved more in the synthesis and reordering of these traditions, but they did so on the basis of Tönnies' own work. Because they were more original and more powerful intellectually, their own synthesis is sometimes more visible than the traditions which went into it. One of the virtues of Tönnies' thought as that it is still possible to discern in it the variety of intellectual influences which went to make it up.

One stage in this synthesis was Tönnies' distinction among the modes of attachment of individuals to each other—his classification of "social bonds." At one time, this classification was so influential that the conception of society as a self-subsistent system almost disappeared, while social theorists concerned themselves with the analysis and classification of social bonds. Nevertheless, even though the classification of modes of attachment to objects with respect to their properties does not constitute an exhaustive definition of a society, the inclusion of attachments and their modes remains indispensable to the differentiated definition which we are presenting here.

Tönnies distinguished primarily between those ties which were characteristic of a tradition-bound village community and those characteristic of a rational, commercially organized urban community. In the ideal instance of the latter, individuals were bound to each other because each saw in the other the means to his own private advantage. In the former, individuals were bound to each other more intrinsically. The composition of this "intrinsic" attachment has been a significant theme for social theorists through the present century.

The elucidation of the four categories of attachment—primordial, personal, sacred, and civil—from Tönnies' view of *Gemeinschaft* was achieved partly by Eugen Schmalenbach and

partly by Talcott Parsons. It would not have been possible without parallel and confluent developments in comparative religion. Here a few names, such as W. Robertson Smith, Jane Ellen Harrison and Anders Nygren, may be no more than mentioned.

7. *Central Institutional and Cultural Systems:* The conceptions of central institutional and central value systems derive from Aristotle's analysis of revolutions, from the studies of the disorders of Roman history, and from the other major writers on revolution through Hobbes (especially in the *Behemoth*) to Marx. The recognition of the existence of consensus, of a dominant consensus, called equally for the recognition of the recurrent failure of consensus to be maintained. Thucydides, Polybius, Sallust, the careers and the speeches of Cicero, Tacitus, Suetonius, Guicciardini and d'Avila, and the actual events of Italian, French and English history, made social theorists acutely aware of the permanent potentiality and the frequent realization of the disruption of order. Where were the sources of this disorder to be found, if not in the imperfect attachments to the central value systems, and in the perpetual struggle between those who are incorporated into the central institutional system and espouse the central value system and those who participate less fully, down to the point of rejection?

8. *Transformation:* A conception of society should not only contain within itself an explicit acknowledgment of the determinants of change. It should also offer guidance to the varieties of change and their major sequences. This was already contained in Aristotle, and ancient writers followed in his path. Modern writers have been less confident about setting forth ideas about recurrent sequences of regimes and types of societies after the tremendous advance made by Hegel and Marx in the elaboration of ideas of immanent development of the cultural and economic systems. Perhaps it was the opening of perspectives of infinite evolution, perhaps the more universal consciousness of the range of human possibility disclosed by the intellectual opening up of Asia and Africa, perhaps the loss of courage and capacity as a result of intellectual specialization—whatever the cause, there is little doubt

that the modes of transformation of societies remain the most open and the least elaborated section of the new prevailing conception of society. Whatever the cause, the classical tradition has been renounced, and nothing has been found to take its place in the analysis of the succession of types of societies and the transformation of social systems.

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