

may be, our emphasizing the fact of common origin also presents an opportunity—namely, to treat the principal modern societies as constituting a system; i.e., a social system more extensive and differentiated than any one society.

It does not seem that the varieties of primitive and intermediate societies can generally and usefully be regarded as comprising larger systems in the sense of the modern system. This difference provides a natural break between the subject matters of the two books. Furthermore, it provides a challenging set of interpretive problems which will guide our discussion of the more advanced intermediate societies, problems whose significance was classically demonstrated by Max Weber.

The *range* of variation among advanced intermediate societies was very wide—think of the contrasts between the Chinese Empire at its height, the Indian caste system, the Islamic empires, and the Roman Empire! All these societies contained *very* highly developed civilizations. Why, then, did the breakthrough to modernization not occur in *any* of the “Oriental” advanced intermediate civilizations? Conversely, what constellation of factors were involved in its occurrence against the background of the most radical structural regression in the history of major societies—namely, the “fall” of the western Roman Empire and the reversion of its territories to more or less “archaic” social conditions in the “dark ages”? This is the historical-interpretive perspective, as distinct from that of systematic theory, which will guide the analysis of the present book as well as its sequel.

the concept of society: the components and their interrelations

two

As we mentioned, the society is a special kind of social system. We treat the social system as one of the primary subsystems of the human *action* system, the others being the behavioral organism, the personality of the individual, and the cultural system.¹

The General Conceptual Scheme of Action

Action consists of the structures and processes by which human beings form meaningful intentions and, more or less successfully, implement them in concrete situations. The word “meaningful” implies the symbolic or cultural level of representation and reference. Intentions and implementation taken together imply a disposition of the action system—individual or collective—to modify its relation to its situation or environment in an intended direction.

We prefer the term “action” to “behavior” because we are interested not in the physical events of behavior for their own sake but in their patterning, their patterned meaningful products (physical, cultural, and other), ranging from implements to works of art, and the mechanisms and processes that control such patterning.

Human action is “cultural” in that meanings and intentions concerning acts are formed in terms of *symbolic* systems (including the codes through which they operate in patterns) that focus most generally about the universal of human societies, language.

There is a sense in which all action is the action of individuals. However,

¹ The reader may find it helpful in following this discussion to refer to Tables 1 and 2, appended to this chapter, for graphic representation of the interrelations between these systems.

both the organism and the cultural system involve essential elements which cannot be investigated at the individual level.

For the organism, the primary structural reference is not the anatomy of the particular organism, but the *species-type*.² To be sure, this type does not actualize itself, but works through the genetic constitutions of unique individual organisms, which involve both varying combinations of the genetic materials characteristic of the species and the effects of different environmental conditions. But however important individual variations may be in determining concrete action, it is the common patterns of large human groups—including their differentiation into two sexes—which constitute the massive organic substratum of action.

It would not be correct to say that the genetic constitution of an organism is modified by environmental influence. Rather, the genetic constitution comprises a general "orientation" which develops into specific anatomical structures, physiological mechanisms, and behavioral patternings as it interacts with environmental factors during the life of the organism. The environmental factors can be analyzed into two categories: first, those responsible for the non-hereditary elements of the physical organism; second, those responsible for the learned elements of behavioral systems, which is the category upon which we must focus. Although an organism may certainly be capable of learning in immediate environments devoid of other behaving organisms, the theory of action is primarily concerned with learning in which other organisms of the same species constitute the most important feature of the general environment.

Symbolically organized cultural patterns, like all other components of living systems, have certainly emerged through evolution. Yet, the human linguistic level of their development is a phenomenon entirely unique to man. The capacity to learn and use language clearly depends on man's special genetic constitution, as the failure of attempts to teach it to other species (especially the primates and "talking" birds) has shown.³ But only this general capacity is genetically determined, not the specific symbolic systems which are actually learned, used, and developed by specific human groups.

Furthermore, despite the great capacity of human organisms for learning and, indeed, for creating cultural elements, no individual can create a cultural system. The main patterning of cultural systems change only over periods of many generations and are always shared by relatively large groups; they are never special to one or a few individuals. Therefore, they are always learned by the individual, who can make only rather marginal creative (or destructive) contributions to their change. Thus the more general cultural patterns provide action systems with a highly stable structural anchorage quite analogous to that provided by the genetic materials of the species-type, focusing on the learned elements of action just as the genes focus upon the inheritable elements.⁴

² Good modern reviews of evolutionary biology are *The Meaning of Evolution* by George Gaylord Simpson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); and *Animal Species and Evolution* by Ernst Mayr (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

³ See Chap. V in *Words and Things* by Roger Brown (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1958).⁴ This point has been clearly stated by Alfred Emerson in "Homeostasis and Comparison of Systems" in Roy Grinker (ed.), *Toward a Unified Theory of Human Behavior* (New York: Basic Books, 1956), pp. 147-162, especially p. 152.

Within the limits imposed by the genetic species-type on the one hand, and the patterning of the culture on the other, lies the opportunity for given individuals and groups to develop independently structured behavioral systems. Because an actor is genetically human, and because his learning occurs in the context of a particular cultural system, his learned behavioral system (which I shall call his personality) shares certain broad features with other personalities—e.g., the language he habitually speaks. At the same time, his organism and its environment—physical, social, and cultural—are always in certain respects unique. Hence, his own behavioral system will be a unique variant of the culture and its particular patterns of action. It is therefore essential to consider the personality system as not reducible to either the organism or the culture—what is learned is part of neither the "structure" of the organism in the usual sense nor a feature of the cultural system. It comprises an *analytically independent system*.⁵

Though intimately intertwined with the personalities of the interacting individuals and the patterns of the cultural system, the process of social interaction forms a fourth system that is analytically independent of both personal and cultural systems, as well as of the organism.⁶ This independence becomes most evident in regard to the requirements for integration that impinge upon systems of social relationships because of their inherent potential for conflict and disorganization. This is sometimes known as the *problem of order* in society, posed in classic form by Thomas Hobbes.⁷ The system of interaction constitutes the social system, the sub-system of action with which this book is primarily concerned.

The above classification of four highly general sub-systems of human action—the organism, personality, social system, and cultural system—is an application of a general paradigm which can be used throughout the field of action, and which I shall use below to analyze social systems. This paradigm analyzes any action system in terms of the following four functional categories: (1) that concerned with the maintenance of the highest "governing" or controlling patterns of the system; (2) the internal integration of the system; (3) its orientation to the attainment of goals in relation to its environment; (4) its more generalized adaptation to the broad conditions of the environment—e.g., the non-action, physical environment. Within action systems, cultural systems are specialized around the function of pattern-maintenance, social systems around the integration of acting units (human individuals or, more precisely, personalities engaged in roles), personality systems around goal-attainment, and the behavioral organism around adaptation (see Table 1).

⁵ A more detailed discussion of the relations of the personality to the other sub-systems of action is contained in Jesse R. Pitts, "Introduction" to Part Three of *Theories of Society*; Talcott Parsons, Edward A. Shils, Kasper D. Naegle, and Jesse R. Pitts (eds.) (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

⁶ "Some Fundamental Categories of the Theory of Action," the general collaborative essay, and "Values, Motives and Systems of Action," the contribution of Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils in *Toward a General Theory of Action* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951). Also see Talcott Parsons, "Interaction," in the forthcoming *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.

⁷ I used Hobbes' statement as a major point of departure for my own treatment of the theory of the social system in *Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937).

The Concept of the Social System

Since the social system is made up of the interaction of human individuals, each member is *both actor* (having goals, ideas, attitudes, etc.) *and object* of orientation for both other actors and himself. The interaction system, then, is an *analytical aspect abstractable* from the total action processes of its participants. At the same time, these "individuals" are also organisms, personalities, and participants in cultural systems.

Because of such interpretation, each of the other three action systems (Culture, Personality, Behavioral Organism) constitutes a part of the environment—or, we may say *an environment*—of a social system. Beyond these systems are the environments of action itself, standing above and below the general hierarchy of factors that control action in the world of life. These relationships are depicted in Table 1.

Below action in the hierarchy stands the Physical-organic environment, including the sub-human species of organisms and the "nonbehavioral" components of human organisms. This is a particularly important boundary of action because, as humans, we know the physical world *only* through the organism. Our minds have no direct experience of an external physical object unless we perceive it through physical processes and the brain "processes" information about it. In their psychologically known sense, however, physical objects are aspects of action.

In principle, similar considerations apply to the environment above action—the "ultimate reality" with which we are ultimately concerned in grappling with what Weber called the "problems of meaning"—e.g., evil and suffering, the temporal limitations of human life, and the like. "Ideas" in this area, as cultural objects, are in some sense symbolic "representations" (e.g., conceptions of gods, totems, the supernatural) of the ultimate realities, but are not themselves such realities.

A fundamental principle about the organization of living systems is that their structures are differentiated in regard to the various exigencies imposed upon them by their environments. Thus the biological functions of respiration, nutrition-elimination, locomotion, and information-processing are bases of differentiated organ-systems, each of which is specialized about the exigencies of certain relations between the organism and its environment. We will use this principle to organize our analysis of social systems.

We will consider social systems in their relations to their most important environments. I will contend that the functional differentiations among the three sub-systems of action other than the social—the cultural system, the personality system, and the behavioral organism—and the articulation of two of them with the two environments of the entire action system, constitute very major references for analyzing the differences among social systems. That is, my analysis will be developed on the basis of the fundamental system-and-environment relations of Table 1.

In the functional terms of our paradigm, the social system is the *integrative* sub-system of action in general. The other three sub-systems of action constitute principal environments in relation to it. In the analysis of societies or other social systems, then, the above principle can be applied. We will see

that three of the primary sub-systems of the society (Table 2, column III) are functionally specialized around their interrelations with the three principal environments of a social system (Table 2, column IV), each relating most directly to one of these environments. Each of these three societal sub-systems may also be considered a distinct environment of the sub-system which is the society's integrative core (Table 2, column II). We will employ this dual application of the functional paradigm throughout the exposition of our general theoretical scheme, and in the analysis of particular societies in the body of the book.⁸

The Concept of Society

In defining a society, we may use a criterion which goes back at least to Aristotle. A society is a type of social system, in any universe of social systems, which attains the highest level of self-sufficiency as a system in relation to its environments.

This definition refers to an abstracted system, of which the other, similarly abstracted sub-systems of action are the primary environments. This view contrasts sharply with our common-sense notion of society as being composed of concrete human individuals. Organisms and the personalities of members of the society would then be internal to the society, not part of its environment. We cannot argue the merits of these two views of societies here. But the reader must be clear about the usage in this book.

With this understanding, the criterion of self-sufficiency can be divided into five sub-criteria, each relating to one of the five environments of social systems—Ultimate Reality, Cultural Systems, Personality Systems, Behavioral Organisms, the Physical-Organic Environment. The self-sufficiency of a society is a function of the balanced combination of its controls over its relations with these five environments and of its own state of internal integration.

We have referred to a hierarchy of control which organizes the interrelations of the analytically distinguished systems. This includes the *cybernetic* aspect of control by which systems high in information but low in energy regulate other systems higher in energy but lower in information (Table 1, column V).⁹ Thus, a programed sequence of mechanical operations (e.g., in a washing machine) can be controlled by a timing switch using very little energy compared with the energy actually operating the machine's moving parts or heating its water. Another example is the gene and its control over protein synthesis and other aspects of cell metabolism.

The cultural system structures commitments vis-à-vis ultimate reality into meaningful orientations toward the rest of the environment and the system of action, the physical world, organisms, personalities, and social systems. In the cybernetic sense, it is highest within the action system, the social system ranking next, and personality and organism falling respectively below that. The

⁸Cf. Talcott Parsons, "Social Systems and Subsystems," in the forthcoming *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.

⁹The theory of cybernetics was first developed by Norbert Wiener in *Cybernetics* (Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1948, second edition, 1961) and was applied to social problems in his *The Human Use of Human Beings* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1954). A good introductory statement for the social scientist will be found in Karl W. Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

physical environment is ultimate in the *conditional*, as distinguished from the organizational, sense. Insofar as physical factors are not controllable by the cybernetically higher-order systems, we must adapt to them or human life will disappear. Human dependence on oxygen, food, tolerable temperatures, and so on, are very familiar examples.

Because of our wide evolutionary perspective, our major concern among the non-social sub-systems of action will be with the cultural system. Because they develop over long periods and under widely varying circumstances, forms of social organization emerge which have increasingly broad adaptive capacities. In their broad characteristics, they tend to become decreasingly subject to major change from narrow, particularized, conditional causes operating through specific physical circumstances or individual organic or personality differences. In the more advanced societies, the range of individual personalities may even broaden whereas the structure and processes of the society become less dependent on individual idiosyncrasies. Thus we must focus on the cybernetically higher-order structures—the cultural system among the environments of the society—in order to examine the major sources of large-scale change.

The Societal Community and Its Environments¹⁰

The core of a society, as a system, is the patterned normative order through which the life of a population is collectively organized. As an order, it contains values and differentiated and particularized norms and rules, all of which require cultural references in order to be meaningful and legitimate. As a collectivity, it displays a patterned conception of membership which distinguishes between those individuals who do and do not belong. Problems involving the "jurisdiction" of the normative system may make impossible an exact coincidence between the status of "coming under" normative obligations and the status of membership, because the enforcement of a normative system seems inherently linked to the control (e.g., through the "police function") of sanctions exercised by and against the people actually residing within a territory.¹¹ Unless these problems become critical, the societal collectivity can act effectively as a unit when required, and so can various of its sub-collectivities.

We will call this one entity of the society, in its collective aspect, the societal community. As such, it is constituted both by a normative system of order and by statuses, rights, and obligations pertaining to membership which may vary for different sub-groups within the community. To survive and develop, the social community must maintain the integrity of a common cultural orientation, broadly (though not necessarily uniformly or unanimously) shared by its membership as the basis of its societal identity. This problem concerns its connection with the superordinate cultural system. However, it must also meet systematically the conditional exigencies regarding the integration of mem-

bers' organisms (and their relations to the physical environment¹²) and personalities. All these factors are complexly interdependent, yet each is a focus for the crystallization of a distinctive type of social mechanism.

The Cultural System as Environment to Society¹³

The central functional exigency of the interrelations between a society and a cultural system is the *legitimation* of the society's normative order. Legitimation systems define the reasons for members' rights and for the prohibitions incumbent upon them. Above all, but not exclusively, the use of power requires legitimation. The present concept of legitimation need not imply the adjective "moral" in a modern sense. But it does imply that it is in some sense "right" that things be done in accord with the institutionalized order.

The function of legitimation is independent of the *operative* functions of a social system. No normative order is ever self-legitimating in the sense that the approved or prohibited way of life simply is right or wrong and admits of no questions. Nor is it ever adequately legitimized by necessities imposed at lower levels of the hierarchy of control—e.g., that things *must* be done in a specific way because the stability or even survival of the system is at stake.

However, the extent of the culturally-grounded independence between the bases of legitimation and specific lower-order operative mechanisms (e.g., bureaucratic organization and economic markets) is highly variable among societies. By and large, an increase in this independence is a main trend of the evolutionary process, involving differentiation between cultural and societal structures and processes. Whatever its position on this line of development, however, a legitimization system is always related to, and meaningfully dependent on, a grounding in ordered relations to ultimate reality. That is, its grounding is always in some sense religious. In quite primitive societies, there actually is little differentiation between the general structures of a society and its religious organization. In more advanced societies, the interrelation of social and cultural systems in the religious and legitimization contexts involves highly specialized and complicated structures.

Cultural value patterns provide the most direct link between the social and cultural systems in legitimizing the normative order of the society. The mode of legitimization in turn is grounded in religious orientations. As cultural systems become more differentiated, however, other cultural structures assume increasing independent importance, particularly the arts, which have special relations to the autonomy of personalities and empirical cognitive knowledge, which at an advanced level becomes science.

Personality as Environment to Society

A society's relation to the personality system differs radically from its relation to the cultural system, because the personality (like the behavioral organism and the physical-organic environment) stands below the social system in the cybernetic hierarchy. The society as a system, and each IV in Table 2.

¹⁰ This section concerns the relations between column II and columns III and IV in Table 2.

¹¹ Talcott Parsons, "Some Reflections on the Place of Force in Social Process," in Harry Eckstein (ed.), *Internal War: Basic Problems and Approaches* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

of its constituent units, is subject to constraining conditions—which are also opportunities to be utilized—in each of these three contexts. Behavior, of which social systems comprise one analytical aspect, is always in another aspect the behavior of living human organisms. Every such organism has at any given moment a given location in physical space which can be changed only through physical motion. Hence, the ecological aspect of the relations among individuals and their actions is never safely neglected. Similar considerations apply to organic processes and to personality functioning and development, both of which are also constantly present as factors of concrete action. Exigencies relating to personalities, behavioral organisms, and the physical-organic environment account for many of the complex, cross-cutting dimensions of the actual organization and functioning of social systems, which require careful analysis and which constantly raise difficulties for social scientists.

The major functional problem concerning the social system's relation to the personality system involves learning, developing, and maintaining through the life cycle adequate motivation for participating in socially valued and controlled patterns of action. Reciprocally, a society must also adequately satisfy or reward its members through such patterns of action, if it is continually to draw upon their performances for its functioning as a system. This relationship constitutes "socialization," the whole complex of processes by which persons become members of the societal community and maintain that status.

Since personality is the *learned organization* of the behaving individual, the socialization process is always critical to its formation and functioning. Successful socialization requires that social and cultural learning be strongly motivated through the engagement of the pleasure mechanisms of the organism. Hence, it depends on relatively stable intimate relations between young children and adults, whose own erotic motives and relations tend to be deeply engaged too. This complex of exigencies, which we have come to understand much more fully since Freud, is an essential aspect of the functioning of kinship systems in all human societies. Kinship always involves an ordering of the erotic relations of adults, of their statuses in relation to presumptive parenthood, of the statuses of the new generation, and of the socialization process itself.¹³ It is an evolutionary universal found in *all* societies, though its forms and relations to other structural complexes vary enormously.

A kinship system requires some stable arrangements for day-to-day living which involve organic and psychological as well as social factors. Hence it is a zone of interpenetration among behavioral, personality, and social systems and the physical environment. The latter reference involves the institutionalization of residence with respect to location and the constitution of the social unit we call the *household*. The household members are the people who live together as a unit. They share a definite location with "physical arrangements," such as a hut or house, or in temporary settlements, a "camp." In most societies, people normally sleep, prepare and eat most of their food, and carry on at least most formally approved sexual activity in that physical and social setting. The household unit is, with all its variations, perhaps the primordial unit of solidarity in social systems.

a certain amount of autonomous responsibility in all societies. The individual performs *services* in some context of collective organization. As a product of a long evolutionary process, these performances become institutionalized in modern societies primarily around the occupational role in a specific-function collectivity, or bureaucratic organization. In any case, the *primary* functional relation between adult individuals and their societies concerns the contributions adults make through performing services and the satisfactions or rewards they derive from them. In sufficiently differentiated societies, capacity for service becomes a mobile resource of the society, mobilizable through the market. When this stage is reached, we can speak of services as an output of the economic process, available for "consumption" in non-economic connections.

For most people in most societies, the places of residence and work are not differentiated. Where this differentiation does occur (mainly in advanced urban communities), these two locations constitute the locational axis of the individual's more routine life. Furthermore, the two places must be mutually accessible, a functional requirement about which the major ecological structure of modern cities is generally formed.

A variety of functional relations between personalities and their environments

ments must be treated in other contexts relative to the social system. An individual's value-commitments and their maintenance link primarily with the cultural system, especially as it interrelates with the society through religion. The maintenance of adequate levels of motivation involves mainly the social structures concerned with socialization, particularly kinship. Although physical health is another matter, it shades complexly into the important but vague areas of mental health and the will of the sick to regain health. It seems that no society is without motivation-maintenance mechanisms that operate through some kind of "therapeutic" procedures.¹⁴ In many societies these procedures are predominantly religious or magical, but in modern societies they have been emerging into an applied science. Yet, in no case are they radically dissociated from kinship on a society-wide basis—rather, therapy generally supplements kinship, which is the focal support for the security of personalities.

Surprising as it may seem, the relation between personamity and social system, socially structured through what we have called *service*, provides the basic unit for the political aspect of societies.¹⁵ Political structures are concerned with organizing collective action for the attainment of collectively significant goals, whether on a society-wide basis or on more narrow bases, either territorially or functionally defined. Advanced political development requires status-differentiation within the adult population on some combination of two bases. The first involves levels of responsibility for coordinated collective action and grounds the institutions of leadership and authority. The second concerns levels of competence, based on knowledge, skill, and the like, and assigns greater influence in collective deliberations to the more competent. A political system's differentiation from the matrix of the societal community involves institutionalizing higher-order statuses in both these contexts, often in

¹⁴ Cf. Benjamin Nelson, "Self-Images and Systems of Spiritual Direction in the History of European Civilization," in S. Z. Klausner (ed.), *The Quest for Self-Control* (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1965).

The Free Press of Glencoe, 1965).
15 Talcott Parsons, "The Political Aspect of Social Structure and Process," in David

very complex combinations. The relation of such statuses to religious leadership, particularly the degree of differentiation between leadership in religious and in political contexts, may also present major complications. The imperative of legitimization, not only of the societal order, but also of political authority in particular, indicates a main context of such complications.

Lower in the cybernetic hierarchy is another basis of complication. As we mentioned earlier, the maintenance of a normative order requires that it be implemented in a variety of respects; there must be very considerable—even if often quite incomplete—compliance with the behavioral expectations established by the values and norms. The most basic condition of such compliance is the internalization of a society's values and norms by its members, for such socialization underlies the consensual basis of a societal community. In turn, socialization to the grounds of consensus is reinforced at various points by interlocking interests, notably economic and political. However, no society can maintain stability in the face of varying exigencies and strains unless the interest constellations of its members are grounded in solidarity and internalized loyalties and obligations.

Beyond consensus and the intermeshing of interests, there is still need for some machinery of enforcement. This need links in turn with the necessity for an authoritative interpretation of the institutionalized normative obligations. Hence, all societies have some type of "legal" procedures by which rights and wrongs can be decided without recourse to violence, and by which parties deemed in the wrong can be constrained from acting upon their interpretations, interests, or sentiments at the expense of others.

Because of the indicated territorial involvements of residence, work, religious activities, political organization, and various other factors, the maintenance of a normative order cannot be dissociated from control over activities within territorial areas. The function of government must include responsibility for preserving the territorial integrity of the society's normative order. This imperative has both an internal and an external reference. The first concerns the conditions of enforcing general norms and facilitating the performance of essential functions by the various units of the society. The second concerns the prevention of disruptive interference by non-members of the community. By virtue of the organic-locational exigencies we have discussed, the two references have one thing in common: The ultimate preventive of disruptive action is the use of physical force.¹⁶ The use of force takes many forms, notably defense vis-à-vis outside territory and deprivation of liberty (imprisonment) within. The control or neutralization of the organized use of force is one functional necessity of maintaining a societal community. In more highly differentiated societies, this always involves some degree of governmental monopolization of socially organized force.

Thus a society's primary exigency vis-à-vis the personalities of its members is the motivation of their participation, including their compliance with the demands of its normative order. This exigency may be divided into three levels. First is the highly generalized commitment to the central value patterns that relate directly to the religious orientations. Second is the "sub-stratum" of the personality which, stemming from early socialization, links with the erotic complex and the motivational significance of kinship and other intimate rela-

tions. Third is the level more directly involved with services and the instrumental activities which vary with particular goals and situations. These levels of the personality correspond roughly to the superego, id, and ego in Freud's classification.

Secondarily, the linkage of the personality with the organism and the organism's involvement with the physical world operates in two relevant contexts which we have noted here. The first concerns the generalized organic processes that condition adequate personality functioning, especially in relation to the complexes of kinship, residence, and health. Second is the relation between coercion by physical force and the problem of maintaining the integrity of a societal normative order throughout a varied territory.

Organism and Physical Setting as Environment to Society

Consideration of the social system's relation to its organic base and, through that, to the physical world must begin with the physical requirements of organic life. Here the primordial problems concern the provision of food and shelter, but many other factors are also problematic in all known societies. Ramifying from the relatively simple tools and skills of primitive peoples to the very complex systems of modernity, technology is the socially organized capacity for actively controlling and affecting objects of the physical environment in the interest of some human want or need. In limiting cases, the social organization may involve simply teaching skills to individual craftsmen who produce by themselves. But even in such cases, if the technology is important, the craftsman is unlikely to remain totally insulated from practitioners of his craft other than the master who taught him. Furthermore, if his work is specialized, he must have some organized relations with consumers of his product and, very likely, with sources of his materials and equipment. Truly, there can be no craft wholly divorced from social organization.

Technological processes obviously serve to meet human needs and wants. They depend on the cultural system for their techniques¹⁷—one person's addition to the total technical lore of his society is always an increment rather than an entirely "new system." Furthermore, technological tasks in this sense are always performed in a socially defined role. Products are very generally, though by no means always, the outcome of collectively organized processes, not the work of one individual. Thus some executive or coordinating functions must be performed in a broad variety of social relations with consumers, suppliers, workers, researchers, and the like.

Technology, then, is the primarily physical reference of the complex which includes the economy as its primary social system reference. The economy is the aspect of the societal system which functions not just to order technological procedures socially, but more importantly to fit them into the social system and control them in the interests of social units, whether individual or collective.¹⁸ The institutional complexes of property, contract, and the regulation of terms of employment are important integrating elements here. The more strictly economic aspects of the complex are, in primitive and archaic societies, em-

¹⁶ Parsons, "Some Reflections on the Place of Force in Social Process," op. cit.

¹⁷ Skill is essentially the internalization of certain elements of culture in the organism.

¹⁸ Talcott Parsons and Neil J. Smelser, *Economy and Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1956).

bedded in diffuse structures where kinship, religion, or political interests are paramount. Under certain circumstances, however, markets develop, along with money as a medium of exchange.

Technological organization, then, should be regarded as a boundary-structure between the society as a system and the organic-physical environment. On the societal side of the boundary, the economy is the focal structure, providing linkage with the societal community. Here, as the traditions of economic theory strongly emphasize, the function of allocation is central. Resources must be allocated toward the satisfaction of the vast variety of wants present in any society, and opportunities for satisfying wants must be allocated among different categories of the population. As socially organized, technological considerations also apply to the utilization of services. As the services of individuals become a truly mobile and allocable resource, they comprise an economic category, as their bracketing with physical goods in the economists' formula "goods and services" makes clear. Once involved (through employment) in an operating organization, however, they become engaged in what is in analytical terms political functioning—organizational processes oriented toward attaining the specific goals of the society or a relevant sub-collectivity.

These considerations imply that technology involves a complex of territorial references parallel to residence. In fact, it differentiates from the residence complex only late in social evolution.¹⁹ Its major concern is the location of "industry." Insofar as personnel perform differentiated occupational or service roles, they must work where their services are needed, though this location must be coordinated with residential factors. However, location must also depend on access to materials and equipment and on distribution of output. Industry in the strict sense represents the case in which such economic considerations take primacy. But the location problems of governmental administration or of specialized religious personnel can be analyzed in somewhat similar terms.

The Societal Community and Self-Sufficiency

Certain priorities of control are inherent in the linkages between the societal sub-systems that relate the society to its environments and the societal community itself. The societal community is dependent on a super-ordinate cultural orientation system which is, above all, the primary source of legitimization for its normative order. This order then constitutes the most essential higher-order reference for the political and economic sub-systems, which connect most directly with the personality and organic-physical environments, respectively. In the political sphere, the priority of the societal normative order is highlighted most sharply in the function of enforcement²⁰ and in the need for agencies of the society to have some final control over sanctioning by

¹⁹ Neil J. Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

²⁰ The emphasis on enforcement here is concerned with the conditions of security of a normative order. Where collective goal-attainment, as discussed above, is at issue, the corresponding emphasis will be on the effective mobilization of services and non-human resources. They are linked by the fact that adequate normative order in the political system is a condition of effective mobilization for goal-attainment.

physical force—not because physical force is the cybernetic controller, but because it must be controlled in order for the higher-order controls to operate. In the economic sphere, the parallel is that economic processes in the society (e.g., of allocation) must be institutionally controlled. Both cases also indicate the functional importance of *normative* control over the organism and the physical environment. When used as sanctions, force and other physical-organic factors contribute much more to the security of collective processes than they can as mere "conditional exigencies." Similarly, the priority of economic over technological considerations—questions of *what* is to be produced (and *for whom*) take precedence over questions of *how* things are to be produced—is a basic requirement for making technology actually useful.²¹

We may now sum up the ramifications of the self-sufficiency criterion we used in defining the concept of a society. A society must constitute a societal community that has an adequate level of integration or solidarity and a distinctive membership status. This does not preclude relations of control or symbiosis with population elements only partially integrated into the societal community, such as the Jews in the Diaspora, but there must be a core of more fully integrated members.

This community must be the "bearer" of a cultural system sufficiently generalized and integrated to legitimize normative order. Such legitimization requires a system of constitutive symbolism which grounds the identity and solidarity of the community, as well as beliefs, rituals, and other cultural components which embody such symbolism. Cultural systems are usually broader than any one society and its community organization, although in areas containing many societies distinct cultural systems may indeed shade into one another. A society's self-sufficiency in this context, then, involves its institutionalizing a sufficient range of cultural components to meet its societal exigencies tolerably well. Of course, the relations among societies having the same or closely related cultural systems present special problems, some of which will be discussed later.

The element of collective organization imposes additional criteria of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency by no means requires that all the role-involvements of all members be carried on within the society. However, a society does have to provide a repertoire of role-opportunities sufficient for individuals to meet their fundamental personal exigencies at all stages of the life cycle without going outside the society, and for the society itself to meet its own exigencies. A celibate monastic order does not meet this criterion, because it cannot recruit new members by birth without violating its fundamental norms.

We have shown that the implementation of a normative order in a collectively organized population entails control over a territorial area. This is a very fundamental imperative regarding the integrity of governmental institutions. Furthermore, it is a major reason why no functionally specific collectivity such as a church or a business firm can be called a society. In relation to members as individuals, then, societal self-sufficiency requires—perhaps this is most fundamental—adequate control of motivational commitments. With exceptions

²¹ Clearly, such priorities do not preclude two-way relations between the levels involved. Certainly a technological innovation leading to a new product can "stimulate" a demand for that product. But such a change always raises a new problem of allocation at the economic level. Is it justified in terms of alternative ways the relevant resources may be used?

which are inherently limiting (such as the establishment of new colonies), this requires that membership be recruited by birth and socialization, initially and primarily through a kinship system, however much it may be supplemented by formal education and other mechanisms. The recruitment complex may be considered a mechanism of social control over the personality structures of the membership.

Finally, self-sufficiency implies adequate control over the economic-technological complex so that the physical environment can be utilized as a resource base in a purposeful and balanced way. This control is intertwined with political control of territory and with control of membership in relation to the residence-kinship complex.

No one of these sub-criteria of self-sufficiency is paramount, except in regard to their generalized relations in the cybernetic and conditional hierarchies. Severe deficiency in any one or any combination of these criteria may be sufficient to destroy a society, or to create chronic instability or rigidity that prevent its further evolution. Hence this scheme will prove particularly useful in explaining breakdowns in the process of social evolution.

The Structural Components of Societies

The foregoing exposition of the relations between a society and its environment has employed a relatively systematic classification of structural components. It is important to make this scheme explicit because it underlies a great deal of the analysis in this book.

Our initial definition of the societal community focused on the interrelatedness of two factors—namely, a *normative order* and a *collectively organized population*. For most general purposes in analyzing societies, we need not extend our classification of components beyond a single distinction within each of these factors. We will distinguish between the aspects of each factor which are primarily internal to the societal community and those which primarily connect it with enveloping systems.

On the normative side, we can distinguish between *norms* and *values*. Values—in the pattern sense²²—we regard as the primary connecting element between the social and cultural systems. Norms, however, are primarily social. They have regulatory significance for social processes and relationships but do not embody "principles" which are applicable beyond social organization, often even a particular social system. In more advanced societies, the structural focus of norms is the legal system.

On the side of organized population, the *collectivity* is the category of intra-social structure and the *role* is the category of boundary-structure. The relevant boundary relation is with the personality of the individual member of the social system of reference. The boundary with the organic-physical complex is of an order that does not require distinct conceptualization in this context, although outputs from both personalities and the cultural system converge upon the organism in socialization processes, in the operation of skills, and in various other ways.

²² It is important not to confuse this usage with the one referring to *valued objects*, which has been maintained by such theorists as Thomas and Znaniecki, Lasswell, Easton, and Homans.

These four structural categories—values, norms, collectivities, roles—may be related to our general functional paradigm.²³ Values take primacy in the pattern maintenance functioning of a social system. Norms are primarily integrative; they regulate the great variety of processes that contribute to the implementation of patterned value commitments. The primary functioning of the collectivity concerns actual goal attainment on behalf of the social system. Where individuals perform societally important functions, it is in their capacity as collective members. Finally, the primary function of the role in the social system is adaptive. This is particularly clear for the category of service, as the capacity to fulfill valued role-performances is the most basic generalized adaptive resource of any society, though it must be coordinated with cultural, organic, and physical resources.

Any concrete structural unit of a social system is always a combination of all four components—the present classification involves *components*, not *types*. We often speak of a role or collectivity as if it were a concrete entity, but this is, strictly speaking, elliptical. There is no collectivity without member roles and, vice-versa, no role which is not part of a collectivity. Nor is there a role or collectivity which is not "regulated" by norms and characterized by a commitment to value patterns. For analytical purposes we can, for example, abstract the value components from a structure and describe them as *cultural objects*, but when they are employed technically as categories of social structure they always refer to components of social systems which also contain all three of the other types of components.

Nevertheless, the four categories of components are, in the nature of the case, independently variable. Knowing the value pattern of a collectivity does not, for example, make it possible to deduce its role-composition. Cases in which the contents of two or more types of components vary together so that the content of one can be deduced directly from another are special and limiting, not general, cases.

Thus, the same value patterns generally form structural parts of a wide variety of different units or sub-systems in a society and are frequently found at many levels in structural hierarchies. Furthermore, the same norms are often essential to the functioning of a variety of kinds of operative units. Thus, the legal rights of property entail common normative elements whether the holder of such rights is a family, a religious body, or a commercial firm. Of course, norms are differentiated by situation and function, but the bases of their differentiation are never the same as those of collectivities and roles. Within limits, then, it appears that any collectivity involved in a certain situation or performing a certain function will be regulated by a certain norm *regardless* of its other features. Finally, such independent variation is also characteristic of roles. For example, executive or managerial roles and certain types of professional roles are common to many types of collectivity, not just one.

The same basic principle of independent variation applies to the relations between the social system and its enveloping systems. It is the person in role, not the total concrete individual, who is the member of a collectivity, even the societal community. For example, I am a member of certain international col-

²³ Cf. Talcott Parsons, "General Theory in Sociology," in Robert K. Merton, Leonard Broom, and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr. (eds.), *Sociology Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1959, and Harper Torchbooks, 1965).

lectivities which are not parts of the American societal community. The plural character of the roles assumed by one personality is a major foundation of sociological theory and must be kept in mind continually. As a society evolves, role pluralism becomes more rather than less important, but it characterizes *any* society.

Process and Change

The phrase "Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives" constitutes the subtitle of this book. The scheme of structural categories just outlined will provide the key references for the comparative aspect of our empirical analysis. Evolution, however, is a summary generalization standing for a type of process of change. Before proceeding to empirical matters, we must briefly consider the treatment of process, change, and the conception of societal evolution.

The type of process characteristic of social systems is what we call *interaction*.²⁴ To comprise action in our sense, such process must focus on symbolic levels. This means, essentially, the linguistic level of expression and communication—the conception of a broad level is justifiable because the factors we call speech and writing mesh with many other meaningful events, such as "gestures," physical "implementations" of goals, and so on. Furthermore, there are symbolic media of interaction other than language, such as money, which are probably better regarded as specialized languages than as essentially different orders of communication.

A language is not merely an aggregation of symbols which have been used in the past; it is a system of symbols which have meaning relative to a code.²⁵ A linguistic code is a normative structure parallel to that composed of societal values and norms—indeed, it is properly considered a special case of the norm if one allows for its cultural, as distinguished from a social, focus.

Processes of communication generally affect the recipients of messages, although the degree to which the effects are ones intended by the communicators is always problematical. The input of a message may stimulate an output which is in some sense a response. However, failure to respond is also an alternative, particularly if some messages are "broadcast" (e.g., printed in a newspaper), so that "anyone" may or may not notice and may or may not respond.

The process which leads to a response that is somehow related to one or more communicative inputs we may call a "decision." This process occurs inside that "black box," the personality of the actor. Insofar as the communication is part of a social process, the personality is acting in a role, the nature of which depends on his relations with the actual and potential recipients of the message and with sources from which communicative inputs are relayed to him.

Though a decision may ostensibly be a response to a particular message, it is elliptical to consider it the consequence of a single stimulus. A decision is always a consequence of a combination of factors, among which an immediate

input is only one. All social process must be conceived as the combination and re-combination of variable, communicable factors.

For example, the use of power can be conceived as the communication of a decision to the requisite parties, the implications of which bind a collectivity and the actions of its relevant members. Thus, in ordering his unit to carry out an attack, an officer merely gives the command, thereby activating a complex behavioral system on the part of his men. Clearly, however, such cybernetic communicative processes can operate effectively only in contexts in which institutional structures exercise tight cybernetic control over the various factors we discussed earlier.²⁶

More detail on social processes will be introduced when particular examples in particular societies, or classes and systems of them, are discussed in subsequent chapters. The special type of process with which this book is concerned, however, is *change*. Though all processes change something, it is useful for our purposes to distinguish from others the processes which change social structures. Here, it is evident that many complex processes are necessary to maintain the functioning of any societal system; if its members never did anything, a society would very soon cease to exist.

At the most general theoretical levels, there is no difference between processes which serve to maintain a system and those which serve to change it. The difference lies in the intensity, distribution, and organization of the "elementary" components of particular processes relative to the states of the structures they affect. However, when we describe a charismatic revolution or the development of a bureaucratic system as processes, we are not speaking at such elementary levels, but are generalizing about very complex combinations of elementary processes. Of course, we will have to do this at many points, partly because space limitations preclude more detail, and partly because we lack knowledge about the finer composition of many of the processes in question.

A Paradigm of Evolutionary Change

Among change processes, the type most important to the evolutionary perspective is the enhancement of adaptive capacity, either within the society originating a new type of structure or, through cultural diffusion and the involvement of other factors in combination with the new type of structure, within other societies and perhaps at later periods. Some societies have been seedbeds of developments that became crucially important only long after the societies themselves ceased to exist. Ancient Israel and Classical Greece did not endure long as distinct, politically independent societies, yet they contributed essential ingredients to the system of modern societies.

Nevertheless, both seedbed developments and cases of more immediate adaptive enhancement (such as the emergence of large-scale bureaucratic organizations in certain empires) seem capable of being analyzed in terms of a

²⁴ Parsons, "Interaction," *op. cit.*

²⁵ See Roman Jacobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956); and Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1955).

common paradigm, which I will simply sketch here, but elaborate further in subsequent chapters.

First is the process of *differentiation*. A unit, sub-system, or category of units or sub-systems having a single, relatively well-defined place in the society divides into units or systems (usually two) which differ in both structure and functional significance for the wider system. To take a familiar example already mentioned, the kinship-organized household in predominantly peasant societies is both the unit of residence and the primary unit of agricultural production. In certain societies, however, most productive work is performed in specialized units, such as workshops, factories, or offices manned by people who are also members of family households. Thus two sets of roles and collectivities have become differentiated, and their functions separated. There must also be some differentiation at the level of norms and some specification of common value patterns to the different situations.

If differentiation is to yield a balanced, more evolved system, each newly

differentiated sub-structure (e.g., the producing organization in the above case) must have increased adaptive capacity for performing its *primary* function, as compared to the performance of that function in the previous, more diffuse structure. Thus economic production is typically more efficient in factories than in households. We may call this process the *adaptive upgrading* aspect of the evolutionary change cycle. It applies to both role and collectivity levels; the participating people, as well as the collectivity as a whole, must become more productive than before, as measured by some kind of output-cost relationship. These changes do not imply that the older "residual" unit will have "lost function" in all contexts of its operations. The household is no longer an important economic producer, but it may well perform its other functions better than in its earlier form.

Differentiation processes also pose new problems of *integration* for the system. The operations of two (or more) categories of structural units must be coordinated where only one category existed before. Thus, in employment occupational systems, the father of the household can no longer supervise production in his *kinship* role. Therefore, the producing organization must develop an authority system which is not embedded in kinship, and the producing and household collectivities must be coordinated within the broader system—e.g., through changes in the structure of the local community.

Adaptive upgrading thus requires that specialized functional capacities be freed from ascription within more diffuse structural units. There is, then, a reliance upon more *generalized* resources that are independent of their ascriptive sources. For these reasons, differentiation and upgrading processes may require the inclusion in a status of full membership in the relevant general community system of previously excluded groups which have developed legitimate capacities to "contribute" to the functioning of the system.²⁷ Perhaps the most common case concerns systems which have been divided into superior and inferior classes, and in which the upper class has monopolized the status of "real" membership, treating the lower class, so far as it is conceived to belong at all, as a second-class citizenry. The processes of differentiation and upgrading make it increasingly difficult to maintain such simple dichotomies. Differentiation, particularly, newly differentiated elements—e.g., cadet lineages with new residential locations.

produces cases in which the necessities for integrating newly differentiated subsystems strongly indicate including otherwise excluded elements.

The final component of the change process pertains to its relation with the value system of the society. Any given value system is characterized by a particular type of *pattern*, so that, when it is institutionalized, it establishes the desirability of a *general type of social system*. By what we have called specification, such a general valuation is "spelled out" in its implications for the various differentiated sub-systems and the various segmental units. Hence, the value orientation appropriate to a particular collectivity, role, or norm-complex is not the general pattern of the system, but an adjusted, specialized "application" of it.

A system or sub-system undergoing a process of differentiation, however, encounters a functional problem which is the opposite of specification: the establishment of a version of the value pattern appropriate to the new *type* of system which is emerging. Since this type is generally more complex than its predecessor, its value pattern must be couched at a higher level of *generality* in order to legitimize the wider variety of goals and functions of its sub-units. The process of generalization, however, often encounters severe resistance because commitment to the value pattern is often experienced by various groups as commitment to its particular content at the previous, lower level of generality. Such resistance may be called "fundamentalism." To the fundamentalist, the demand for greater generality in evaluative standards appears to be a demand to abandon the "teal" commitments. Very severe conflicts often crystallize about such issues.²⁸

The state of any given society and, still more, of a system of related societies (such as that comprised of the Middle and Near Eastern city-state societies in antiquity) is a complex resultant of progressive cycles involving these (and other) processes of change. Such a resultant will, at any broad stage of a more general process, tend to produce a fan-like spectrum of types that vary according to their different situations, degrees of integration, and functional locations in the broader system.

Some variants within a class of societies having broadly similar characteristics will, more than others, favor additional evolutionary steps. Some of the others may, indeed, be so beset with internal conflicts or other handicaps that they can barely maintain themselves, or will even deteriorate. But among these may be, as we mentioned, some of the most creative societies from the viewpoint of originating components of great long-run importance.

When somewhere in a variegated population of societies there emerges a developmental "breakthrough," the ensuing process of innovation will, I suggest, always approximate our paradigm of evolutionary change. Such a breakthrough endows its society with a new level of adaptive capacity in some vital respect, thereby changing the terms of its competitive relations with other societies in the system. Broadly, this kind of situation opens four possibilities for the societies not immediately sharing the innovation. The innovation can simply be destroyed by more powerful, even if less advanced, rivals. If the innovation is cultural, though, it is difficult to destroy completely, and may forth in "Some Considerations on the Theory of Social Change," in *Rural Sociology* (September 1961), 219-239.

assume great importance even after its society of origin has been destroyed. Second, the terms of competition may be "evened" through adoption of the innovations. The present drive to "modernization" among underdeveloped societies is an obvious and important case in point. A third alternative is the establishment of an insulated niche in which the society can continue to maintain its old structure, relatively undisturbed. The final possibility is the loss of societal identity through disintegration or absorption by some larger societal system. These possibilities are type concepts, and many complex combinations and shadings of them may occur.

The Differentiation of the Sub-systems of Society

We must now consider the broad lines along which societal differentiation is likely to proceed. Given the cybernetic nature of social systems, these lines must be *functional*. The increasing complexity of systems, insofar as it is not due only to segmentation, involves the development of systems specialized about more specific functions in the operation of the system as a whole, and of integrative mechanisms which interrelate the functionally differentiated sub-systems.

For our purposes, it has been essential to analyze function on two principal levels, the general action system and the social system. Each level has the potential to increase the degree of its differentiation into sub-systems, along the lines of the four functional references we have outlined

The most conspicuous processes of evolution out of primitive social conditions concern the general action level, particularly the relation between social and cultural systems. However, the special relations of the organisms to technology, and of the personality system to political organization, indicate that the other two primary sub-systems of action are also involved very fundamentally.

The next chapter will argue that a very low level of differentiation among these four sub-systems—perhaps approaching the minimum level that is congruent with human modes of action—is the major distinctive criterion of the most primitive type of society.

The differentiation between cultural and societal systems is, in its earlier stages, most conspicuous in the field of religion, becoming evident as greater "distance" emerges between the gods and the human condition.²⁹ This first develops in more advanced primitive societies, becomes much more marked in archaic societies, and reaches a crucial new level in what Bellah calls the "historic" religions.³⁰ A parallel process of differentiation can be traced between personality and society concerning the degree of autonomy of individuals. Between the organism and society, differentiation emerges between the level of physical technology and the level of economic processes that is concerned with the allocation of mobile resources, the consumable goods which are "appropriated" or produced, and the factors of production.

As the above outline of inter-system relations shows, we would expect this process of differentiation at the level of the general action system to stimulate, and be stimulated by, similar processes internal to the society as a system. What we call the pattern-maintenance system of the society has *cultural* primacy in that it is the locus of direct relationship with the cultural system. It first becomes clearly differentiated from the other societal sub-systems as the latter establish themselves as clearly "secular" spheres which, though legitimized in religious terms, are not directly part of the religious system. This process leads to the differentiation of "Church and state," which was not fully achieved until the post-Roman phases of Christianity.

The development of autonomous legal systems is perhaps the most important indicator of differentiation between the societal integrative system, focusing about the societal community, and the polity, which is concerned with the selection, ordering, and attainment of collective goals rather than the maintenance of solidarity (including order) as such. Of all pre-modern systems, Roman society made the greatest progress in this direction.

Finally, the economy tends to become differentiated, not only from technology, but also from the polity and those aspects of pattern-maintenance associated with kinship. Money and markets are among the most important institutional complexes involved in the differentiation of the economy. Perhaps the differences between Mesopotamian and Greek society mark the most crucial earlier steps in this institutional development, but many additional developments occurred in the transition to modern systems.

The master scheme of four functions and our analysis of the tendency of societal systems to differentiate into four *primary* sub-systems will constitute major guidelines for our whole analysis.³¹ Where there appear to be more than four important sub-systems, we will treat this in one or a combination of three ways. First, the essential phenomenon may be due to *segmentation* rather than differentiation. Second, more than one level of system-reference may be involved. For example, kinship institutions involve a special integration between societal components located in the pattern-maintenance sub-system and personality, and are hence functionally less differentiated than such structures as modern universities or churches. Third, there are different distributions of primacy among functionally significant components, so that important typological distinctions must be made *within* a relatively highly differentiated sub-system—e.g., an economy or polity. Often these differences result from interpenetrations with elements at other system levels or other sub-systems at the same level.

Hence, it should be clear that the grounding of the above classification is analytical, not concrete.³² Any particular sub-system of a society may involve all three types of complication in a special combination. It is, however, important for theoretical purposes to disentangle them analytically. Although the concrete specifics will vary considerably (and complexly) according to the type of system we are analyzing, the reference points of the societal sub-systems—pattern-maintenance, integration, polity, and economy—will comprise a major analytical tool of our entire analysis.

²⁹ Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 1964).

³⁰ See below, Chaps. IV and V, and Robert N. Bellah, "Religious Evolution," in

American Sociological Review (June 1964).

³¹ Cf. Parsons, Part II of the "General Introduction" to *Theories of Society*, op. cit. ³² That is, it follows from the theoretical relations depicted in Table 2, especially in columns I, II, III.

Stages in the Evolution of Societies

An evolutionary perspective implies both a criterion of evolutionary direction and an evolutionary scheme of stages. We have formulated the directional factor as an increase in generalized adaptive capacity consciously adapting it from the theory of organic evolution. It will be further interpreted in our concluding chapter.

Here it remains to address the problem of stages. We do not conceive societal evolution to be either a continuous or a simple linear process, but we can distinguish between broad levels of advancement without overlooking the considerable variability found in each. For the limited purposes of this book and its sequel, we will distinguish three very broad evolutionary levels, which we will call *primitive*, *intermediate*, and *modern*. This book will focus upon the first two categories, leaving the third for the *sequel*. There is some arbitrariness in any particular scheme of stages, and within the two broad categories to be treated below, we will find it essential to make a major sub-division within each.³³

The dividing criteria, or watersheds, between the major stages in our classification center about critical developments in the code elements of the normative structures. For the transition from primitive to intermediate society, the focal development is in language, which is primarily part of the cultural system. In the transition from intermediate to modern society, it is in the institutionalized codes of normative order internal to the societal structure and centers in the legal system.

In both cases, the criterion stated is merely a catch-word indicating a complex subject matter. Written language, the focus of the fateful development out of primitiveness, increases the basic differentiation between the social and cultural systems and vastly extends the range and power of the latter. The principal symbolic contents of a culture can, with writing, be embodied in forms which are independent of concrete interaction contexts. This makes possible an immensely wider and more intensive cultural diffusion, both in space (e.g., relative to populations) and in time. It initiates the phenomenon of "broadcasting"—i.e., the orientation of messages to undefined audiences, to whomever is literate in the language and comes across the document. Furthermore, there is no inherent time limitation on the relevance of a message. Only literate cultures can have a *history* in the sense of an awareness, based on documentary evidence, of past events which are beyond the memories of living persons and the vague hearsay of oral traditions.

There are many aspects and stages of the development and institutionalization of written language and literacy.³⁴ The early stages, particularly prominent in what we call archaic societies, generally confine writing to the "craft" literacy of small groups using it for specialized purposes, often esoterically religious and magical. A second important development, probably a criterion of the advanced intermediate society, is the institutionalization of full literacy for

³³ Bellah, in his notable article, "Religious Evolution," uses a scheme of five major stages, which does not exactly correspond with the present scheme. Partly, we have different perspectives, Bellah's being more specifically upon cultural than societal factors. But I think our differing schemes also involve a difference of theoretical opinion.

³⁴ Cf. Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (April 1963).

the adult males of an upper class. Such societies usually organize their cultures about a set of especially important, usually sacred, writings, knowledge of which is expected of all "educated" men. Only modern societies approach institutionalizing literacy for the whole adult population, which indeed may signalize a second major stage of modernity.

Written language and the availability of documents act to stabilize a great many social relations. For example, the terms of a contractual agreement need not depend on the fallible memories of the parties or witnesses but can be written and made available for verification as need arises. The importance of such stability should not be underestimated. Undoubtedly, it is a major condition for increasing the extent and complexity of many components of social organization.

At the same time, writing is also a source of flexibility and an opportunity for innovation. However frequently "classical" documents have provided the basis for a rigid traditionalism, the availability of officially correct documents makes possible a much more far-reaching and deep-going critical analysis of relevant cultural issues. If the document is normative for some sphere of action, it poses quite acutely the problem of how, in practical situations, its injunctions may actually be fulfilled. Above all, written documents form a basis for a cumulative cultural development; they permit the *differences* introduced by an innovation to be defined far more precisely than by oral tradition alone.

While written language furthers the *independence* of the cultural system from the more conditional exigencies of the society, law, when developed to the requisite level, furthers the independence of the normative components of the societal structure from the exigencies of political and economic interests and from the personal, organic, and physical-environmental factors operating through them.

The problem concerning the kind of law, the institutionalization of which marks the transition from intermediate to modern societies, is highly complex. Clearly, its organization must be highly generalized according to universalistic principles. It is this factor, above all, that precludes such imposing systems as the Talmudic law, or that of traditional Islam, from being classed as "modern" law. They lack the level of generality which Weber called *formal rationality*.³⁵ Modern legal systems must also strongly emphasize the factor of *procedure*, as distinguished from substantive precepts and standards. Only on the basis of procedural primacy can the system cope with a wide variety of changing circumstances and types of cases without prior commitment to specific solutions.

As we shall see, Roman law of the Imperial period came by far the closest, among pre-modern systems, to meeting the more "formal" aspects of these requirements—and, of course, it made essential contributions to the later emergence of fully modern systems. However, it was not a sufficient framework for developing "modern" structures in the Roman Empire itself. We will suggest that this was primarily due to the level of the institutionalization of law in Roman society. The Roman Empire did not develop a sufficiently integrated societal community, and failed to integrate all the major ethnic, territorial, and religious groups with reference to a single primary normative order standing for the whole society and above the authority of Roman government.

³⁵ Cf. Max Rheinstein (ed.), *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), especially Chap. 8.

Table 1

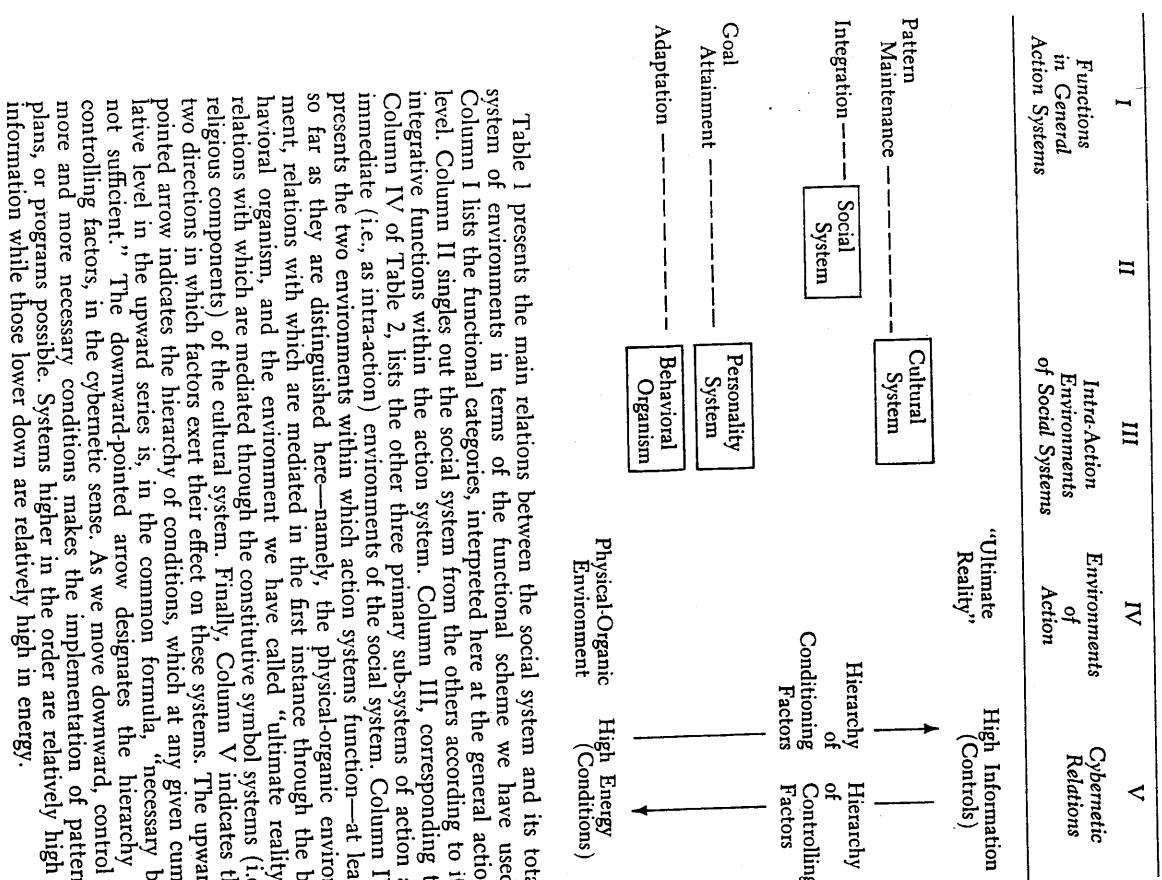


Table 1 presents the main relations between the social system and its total system of environments in terms of the functional scheme we have used. Column I lists the functional categories, interpreted here at the general action level. Column II singles out the social system from the others according to its integrative functions within the action system. Column III, corresponding to Column IV of Table 2, lists the other three primary sub-systems of action as immediate (i.e., as intra-action) environments of the social system. Column IV presents the two environments within which action systems function—at least so far as they are distinguished here—namely, the physical-organic environment, relations with which are mediated in the first instance through the behavioral organism, and the environment we have called “ultimate reality,” relations with which are mediated through the constitutive symbol systems (i.e., religious components) of the cultural system. Finally, Column V indicates the two directions in which factors exert their effect on these systems. The upward-pointed arrow indicates the hierarchy of conditions, which at any given cumulative level in the upward series is, in the common formula, “necessary but not sufficient.” The downward-pointed arrow designates the hierarchy of controlling factors, in the cybernetic sense. As we move downward, control of more and more necessary conditions makes the implementation of patterns, plans, or programs possible. Systems higher in the order are relatively high in information while those lower down are relatively high in energy.

Table 2

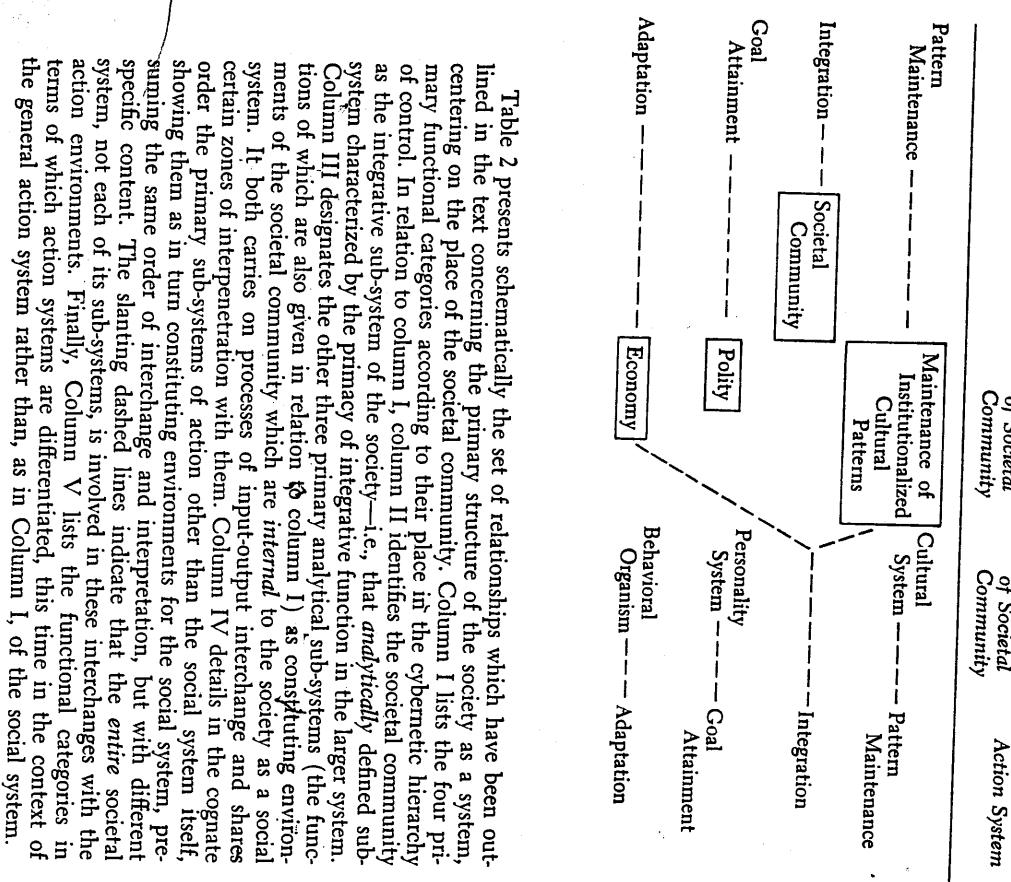


Table 2 presents schematically the set of relationships which have been outlined in the text concerning the primary structure of the society as a system, centering on the place of the societal community. Column I lists the four primary functional categories according to their place in the cybernetic hierarchy of control. In relation to column I, column II identifies the societal community as the integrative sub-system of the society—i.e., that *analytically* defined sub-system characterized by the primacy of integrative function in the larger system. Column III designates the other three primary analytical sub-systems (the functions of which are also given in relation to column I) as constituting environments of the societal community which are *internal* to the society as a social system. It both carries on processes of input-output interchange and shares certain zones of interpenetration with them. Column IV details in the cognate order the primary sub-systems of action other than the social system itself, showing them as in turn constituting environments for the social system, presupposing the same order of interchange and interpretation, but with different specific content. The slanting dashed lines indicate that the *entire* societal system, not each of its sub-systems, is involved in these interchanges with the action environments. Finally, Column V lists the functional categories in terms of which action systems are differentiated, this time in the context of the general action system rather than, as in Column I, of the social system.