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by

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Social systems and Subsystems

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SOCIAL SYSTEMS AND-SUBSYSTEMS

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The general scientific significance of the concept system is underlined by discussions in several contexts and fields in the present section of the Encyclopedia. In this article I will assume that all sophisticated theory in the conceptually generalizing disciplines is - and must be - organized about the idea of system: the concept that refers to the interdependences, both among parts, components, and processes within a system and between the system and its environment, that involve discernible regularities of relationship. It is simply held that such regularities can be more adequately understood if the whole set of multiple interdependences is taken more fully into explicit account.

Methodologically, one must distinguish a theoretical system which is a complex of assumptions, concepts, and propositions having both logical integration and empirical reference, from an empirical system, which is a set of phenomena in the observable world that can be described and analysed with a theoretical system. An empirical system (e.g. the solar system as relevant to analytical mechanics) is never a totally concrete entity, but rather a selective organization of those properties of the concrete entity defined as relevant to the theoretical system in question. Thus, for Newtonian solar system mechanics, the earth is "only" a particle with a given mass, location in space, velocity, and direction of motion; the Newtonian scheme is not concerned with the earth's geological or human social and cultural characteristics. In this sense any theoretical system is abstract.

As a theoretical system, the social system is specifically adapted to describing and analyzing social interaction considered as a class of empirical systems. These systems are concerned with the behavior, as distinguished from the metabolic physiology, of living organisms. Among the categories of organisms, our interest in this article centers, not merely for "zoocentric" reasons, on human social interaction, which is organized on the symbolic levels we call "cultural". However, one should remember that such interaction is a late evolutionary product, and is continuous with a very broad range of interaction phenomenon among other organisms. All bisexual reproduction, for example, requires highly structured interactive relations between the organisms of the two sexes. Various kinds of interspecies ecological relations constitute another example, one to which human relations with domesticated animals are relevant.

The aspects of behavior which directly concern "cultural-level" system I call action. Action in this technical sense includes four generic types of subsystems, the differentiation among which has gained fairly clear definition during modern intellectual history.

The first is simply the organism, which, though quite properly treated as the concrete entity itself in one set of terms, becomes, on a more generalized level, a set of abstract components in (i.e. subsystem in) the culturally organized system of action.

(1) cf. Talcott Parsons: "Interaction", article in this Encyclopedia.
A second subsystem is the social system, that generated by the process of interaction among "individual" units. Its distinctive properties are consequences and conditions of the specific modes of interrelationship obtaining among the living organisms which constitute its units, in the sense of the term paralleling that of particles in classical mechanics.

Third is the cultural system, as that aspect of action organized about the specific characteristics of symbols and the exigencies of forming stable systems of them. It is structured in terms of patterning of meaning, which when stable imply in turn generalized complexes of constitutive symbolism that give the action system its primary "sense of direction", and which must be treated as independent of any particular system of social interaction. Thus, although there are many ramifications into such areas as language and communication, the prototypical cultural systems are those of beliefs or ideas. The possibilities of their preservation over time, and of their diffusion from one personality and/or social system to another, are perhaps the most important hallmarks of the independent structure of cultural systems.

Fourth, the analytical distinction between social and cultural systems has a correlative relation between the organism and other aspects of the individual actor, which we generally call the personality. With the achievement of cultural levels of the control of behavior, the primary subsystems of action can no longer be organized - or structured primarily - about the organic base which, in the first instance, is anatomical or "physical". Personality, then, is the aspect of the living individual, as "actor", which must be understood in terms of the cultural and social content of the learned patterning constitutive of his behavioral system. Here, "learned" refers not only to the problem of the origin of the patterns in the heredity-environment sense, but also to the problem of the kind and level of their content. The connexion between these two problems partly reflects the fact that we have no evidence that cultural content is, at what we call here the level of pattern, determined through the genes. Thus, there is no evidence of a hereditary "propensity" to speak one language rather than another, though the genetically determined capacities to learn and use language are generally fundamental.

Thus, we treat the social system, when evolved to the action level, as one of four primary subsystems of action, all of which articulate with the organic bases of life and organic adaptation to the environment in the broadest sense of biological theory.

There is a sense in which the social system is the core of human action systems, being the primary link between the culture and the individual both as personality and as organism - a fact for which "culture and personality" theorists have often not adequately accounted. As the principal source of the independence of cultural systems from restrictive organic and environmental conditions, it has been the primary locus of the "operation bootstrap" of human evolution. The "secret" of this evolutionary capacity evidently lies in the possibility for "reverberation" among the intercommunicating members of a social system, each of whom is both an actor orienting himself to his situation in terms of complex, cultural-level, intended meanings and an object of orientation meaningful to orienting actors. Furthermore, each person is both actor and object to himself as well as to others. Interaction at the symbolic level thus becomes a system analytically and, very appreciably, empirically independent of its presymbolic bases - though still grounded in them - and is capable of development "on its own".
Insight into this basic complex of facts constitutes a principal foundation of modern social science theory. It has been attained by convergence from at least four sources, namely Freud's psychology, starting from a medical-biological base, Weber's sociology, which worked to transcend the problems of the German intellectual tradition concerning idealism-materialism, Durkheim's analysis of the actor's relations to the "social facts" of his situation, and the social psychology of the American "symbolic interactionists", Cooley and Mead, who built upon the philosophy of pragmatism.

In dealing with social systems, one must distinguish terminologically between an actor as a unit in a social system and the system as such. The actor may be either an individual or some kind of collective unit. In both cases, the actor within a system of reference will be spoken of as acting in a situation consisting of other actor-units within the same system of reference which are considered as objects. The system as a whole, however, "functions" (but does not "act" in a technical sense) in relation to its environment. Of course, the system references are inherently relative to particular scientific problems. When a collective, i.e. social, system is said to act (e.g. in the case of a government conducting foreign relations), this will mean that it and the objects of its action (e.g. other "nations") constitute the social system of references, and that these objects are situation, not environment, to the acting collectivity.

A social system, like all living systems, is inherently an open system engaged in processes of "interchange" (or input-output relations) with its environment, as well as being comprised of interchanges among its internal units. Regarding it as an open system is, from some viewpoints, to regard it as a part of, i.e. a subsystem of, one or more superordinate systems. In this sense, it is interdependent with the other parts of the more comprehensive system(s), and hence partly dependent on them for essential inputs. Here the dependence of the organism on its physical environment for nutrition and respiration is prototypical. This is the essential basis of the famous concept of function in regard to social systems, as to all other living systems.

For any system of reference, functional problems are those concerning the conditions of the maintenance and/or development of the interchanges with environing systems, both inputs from them and outputs to them. Functional significance may be determined by the simple criterion of the disfunctional consequences of failure, deficit, or excess of an input to a receiving system - e.g. failure of oxygen input to the organism. Function is the only basis on which a theoretically systematic ordering of the structure of living systems is possible. In this context functional references certainly need be no question about how structural arrangements have come about - the biological concepts of variation, selection, and adaptation have long since provided a framework for analysing the widest variety of change processes.

Goal-attaining processes explicitly intended to fulfill functional requirements constitute a limiting but very important case. Outputs in this sense have primary functional significance only for the system which receives them, and which is situational or environmental to the system of reference, though they have secondary functional significance to the latter: e.g. although economic output ("produced" goods) goes to "consumers", the maintenance of certain levels of saleable output

(1) A fuller discussion of its antecedents in intellectual history will be found in the article on Interaction cited above.
clearly has great significance to producing organizations. It is its inputs that have primary functional significance to any given system of reference. The "factors of production" of economic theory are classic examples, being the critical inputs of the economy.

In a crucial sense, the relation between any action system - including the social - and any of its environments is dual. On the one hand, the particular environment constitutes a set of objects which are exterior to the system in the Cartesian-Durkheimian sense. On the other hand, through interpenetration, the environmental system is partially and selectively included in the action system of reference. Internalization of cultural and social objects in the personality of the individual is certainly the prototypical case of interpenetration, but the principle it involves should be generalized to all the relations between action systems and their environments.

Thus, neither the individual personality, nor the social system has any direct relation to the physical environment; their relations with the latter are entirely mediated through the organism, which is action's primary link with the physical world. This, after all, is now a commonplace of modern perceptual and epistemological theory. (1)

In essentially the same sense, neither personalities nor social systems have direct contact with the ultimate objects of reference, with the "ultimate reality" which poses the "problems of meaning" in the sense sociologists associate above all with the work of Max Weber. The objects they know and otherwise directly "experience" are in our terminology cultural objects, which are human artifacts in much the same sense as objects of empirical cognition. Hence, their relations with ultimate "non-empirical reality" are mediated very fundamentally through the cultural system.

Emphasis on their lack of direct contact with what is "out there", concerns in both cases certain qualities of the environing "systems" as objects. There is, however, important contact with the physical and supernatural environments through the interpenetration of the latter into action systems. Hence, such concepts as "knowledge" are not naive illusions, but modes of the organization of the relations between the various action systems and their environments. (2) We must regard the relations between the subsystems of action, and between action system and the

(1) I have an "image" of a lilac bush that is in incipient bloom outside the window as I write. The physical reality of that image, however, is not "out there" in the yard, but in my brain. I am an epistemological realist of the sort who profoundly believes that the entity out there, which I call a lilac bush, is "really there" and has properties in some sense congruent with my image. But, it would be quite untenable to claim that what I "see" is what is out there. Parallel considerations apply to the noncognitive modes of orientation to external realities. Care should be taken, however, not to push such parallels to the extreme of considering all orientation as "cognitive", as has much recent theory in social psychology and anthropology.

(2) A.N. Whitehead in Process and Reality (New York: MacMillan, 1929) and G.H. Mead in The Philosophy of the Act (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1938) ground the analysis of action in philosophical positions very similar to that assumed here.
systems of non-action, as pluralistic. That is, there will be no one to one correspondence between any two interdependent and interpenetrating systems, but there will be a complex relation which can perhaps be understood by theoretical analysis. This is true of "heredity and environment", "culture and personality", and the "ideal" and "real" factors in social systems.

It is necessary to consider the various environments of a living system because each is engaged in one of the interchange relations with the system, the specialized natures of which serve as the primary bases of the internal differentiation of the system. For instance, the nutrition-elimination systems, the respiratory system, and the locomotor system of an organism are differentiated from each other on this basis. This, as noted, is the essential meaning of the controversial (in social, not biological, science) concept of function. The basis of differentiation is functional, the differing input-output relations with the various environments of the system and, following from that, the internal relations among the differentiated parts of the system itself.

On the understanding that all social systems are systems of interaction, the best reference point among their many types for general theoretical purposes is the society. The definition of this concept presents considerable difficulties, the history of which cannot occupy us here. For present purposes, I shall define it as the category of social system embodying, at the requisite levels of evolutionary development and of control over the conditions of environmental relations, the greatest self-sufficiency of any type of social system.

By self-sufficiency (a criterion which has figured prominently in Western thought on the subject since Aristotle at least), I mean the capacity of the system, gained through both its internal organization and resources and its access to inputs from its environments, to function autonomously in implementing its normative culture, particularly its values, but also its norms and collective goals. Self-sufficiency is clearly a degree of generalized adaptive capacity in the sense of biological theory.

The term environment is pluralized here to emphasize the fact that the relevant environment is not just physical, as in most formulations of general biological theory, but also includes the three basic subsystems of action other than the social, which have been outlined above.

The core structure of a society I will call the societal community. More specifically, at different levels of evolution, it is called tribe, or the "people", or, for classical Greece, the polis, or, for the modern world, the nation. It is the collective structure in which "members" are united or, in some sense, "associated". Its most important property is the kind and level of solidarity - in Durkheim's sense - which characterizes the relations among its members.

The solidarity of a community is essentially the degree - and ways - to which its collective interest can be expected to prevail over the unit interests of its members wherever the two conflict. It may involve mutual respect among the units for the rights of membership status, conformity with the values and norms institutionalized in the collectivity, or positive contribution to the attainment of collective goals. The character of solidarity varies with the level of differentiation in the society, differentiation which is evident in the structures of the roles in which a given individual is involved, of the system's sub-collectivities.
and of its norms and specified value orientations. The best-known basis of classifying the types of solidarity is Durkheim's two categories, mechanical and organic. (1)

Both types of solidarity are characterized by common values and institutionalized norms. In the case of mechanical solidarity, however, the patterns of action expected from units are also uniform for all units in the system; relative to one another, the units are segments, not being functionally differentiated. Durkheim analysed crime as the prototypical violation of the obligations of mechanical solidarity. For full members of the community, no matter how highly differentiated the society, the treatment of the criminal should ideally be the same always, regardless of who commits the crime, even though this ideal is frequently and seriously deviated from. At the societal community level in differentiated societies, the core of the system of mechanical solidarity lies in the patterns of citizenship in T.H. Marshall's sense. (2) These can be conveniently sub-divided into the components of civil-legal citizenship, political citizenship and social citizenship. In modern American society, the Bill of Rights and associated Constitutional structures, such as the Fourteenth Amendment, comprise the most directly relevant institutions in this field.

Organic solidarity concerns those aspects of the societal system in which rôles, sub-collectivities, and norms are differentiated on a functional basis. Here, though common value patterns remain of the first importance at the relevant levels of specification to the various subsystems, expectations of behaviour differ according to role and sub-collectivity. Solidarity, then, involves the integration of these differing expectations with respect to the various bases of compatible functioning from mutual non-interference to positive mutual reinforcement.

Organic solidarity seems to be particularly important in three primary structural contexts. Most familiar is the one Durkheim himself particularly stressed, namely the economic division of labour, where the most important institutional patterns are contract and property. Second is what we ordinarily call the area of political differentiation, that of both the organization of authority and leadership and the various modes of participation in collective decision-making, which involve the interplay of information and influence bearing on collective action. The third, then, is the area of the society's relations with its cultural involvements. This concerns the society's articulation with, particularly, the religious system, but also with - and the more so, the more differentiated both the society and culture - the arts, the system of intellectual disciplines, and the relationship between the patterns of moral obligation and those of law.

In all three contexts, organic solidarity is associated with the phenomenon generally called pluralism. In none of these cases is the structure of a subsystem articulating with the societal community ascribed to the structure of the latter. On the contrary, as a function of the level of differentiation among the articulating subsystems, there is an increasing flexibility that facilitates the concrete relations coming to be established by relatively specific processes. Thus, there is, first, a pluralism of economic interests which, if uncontrolled, would tend to


destroy the solidarity of the societal community - indeed, it may be suggested that an exaggerated anxiety about this underlies much of the modern socialist dogma that only the central societal collectivity, the state, can be trusted with any interest which seems important to the public welfare. However, there is a second pluralism of "interest groups" in the political context which, though of course linked with the economic pluralism, is by no means the same. The political process, as that leading to collective decision-making, is in part a "political struggle" among such interest groups. Thus, it has great potential for disrupting societal solidarity. However, it can also, not merely contain the struggle, but, even more positively, further integrate the disparate groups by virtue of various mechanisms of integrative control. Finally, the more differentiated societal community tends also to be culturally pluralistic. This is particularly conspicuous in the few Western societies which have attained a certain level of religious pluralism. Thus, at the very least, contemporary American society is a multi-denominational, "Judeo-Christian" society which also includes "secular humanists" who prefer not to affiliate with any explicitly religious association. In one sense, it has "transcended" the historic bases of religious conflict which prevailed in the Western world for centuries. The basis of this is genuine "denominational pluralism", not only before the law, but also in terms of acceptance in the community.

Very closely associated with this is the pluralism among the intellectual disciplines which has gained institutionalization in modern society, especially in the university system. (1) The rise of the sciences was, in the first instance, a profound symptom of this pluralization. But it has now become a major factor in the future development of modern society in a variety of ways. The problem of "ethical" pluralism is analytically more difficult and complex. The trend seems to be away from the special kind or moral uniformity which characterizes societies in which mechanical solidarity predominates. The essential point concerns the level of generality at which common moral standards are defined: if a pluralistic society is to integrate its many various kinds of units into a solidary societal community, what counts as moral obligation cannot be defined in terms specific to each kind of unit, but must be sufficiently general to apply to the considerable range of differentiated classes of units. Moralism ties morality to the specifics of a sub-group or a particular stage of social development, and must be discriminated from concern with maintaining control of action in accord with more generalized moral standards.

The societal community in the present sense is articulated most directly with the cultural and political subsystems of the society. Furthermore, it is in these two relationships that the main connections between organic and mechanical solidarity are lodged.

The cultural (or pattern-maintenance) system centres on the institutionalization of cultural value-patterns, which, at the general cultural level, may be regarded as moral. Institutionalized societal values, and their specifications to societal subsystems, comprise only part of the relevance of moral values to action; moral values are also involved, through internalization, in structures of the personality and behavioral organism; and, more generally, they articulate with religion, science, and the arts within the cultural system.

Community in the present sense is never a simple matter of the "acting out" of value-commitments. It also involves differentiated acceptance, in valuational terms, of the conditions necessary for the functioning of societies and their

subsystems. Essentially this latter element draws the line between utopianism - making an imperative of "pure" value-actualization - and realistic social "idealism". Avoiding the utopian dilemma involves organizing the value system so as to include the positive valuation of social relationships for their own sake, not only as being rigidly instrumental to specific value-patterns.

But this is not the whole story. In addition to a general "set", establishing a presumption of legitimacy for the social system as such, there must also be a more flexible set of mechanisms providing for adaptation between the cultural subsystem of the society and the societal community itself. These mechanisms concern the capacity for handling the changing needs and exigencies of various associational relationships in the light of both their developing interrelations and their relations with the value system; the more particularized commitments must be a function of changing conceptions of the imperatives of relationship, as defining the nature of "valued association". The commitment to the societal community is, so far as this interchange develops flexibility, no longer ascriptive, but dependent on need for such commitment and on evaluation of its compatibility with deeper moral commitments at the cultural level. One aspect of this flexibility is the individual's enhanced moral independence from imperatives of unquestioning obligations to "conformity". But the obverse aspect is the "right" of the community to expect appropriate flexibility in the adaptation of moral demands to exigencies of realistic implementation.

The minimum imperatives of specified common value-commitment define one pole of the structures of the societal system organized with mechanical solidarity. There is a place for organic solidarity in this context so far as such commitments are so firm as not to be "negotiable" and so general as to permit the kind of flexibility in adapting to particular "exigencies" which has just been discussed. What I above called moralism is the limiting case where lack of generality (and perhaps firmness of commitment) forecloses upon such flexibility. The basic rights of members in the societal community constitute, in negative definition, the limits of application of these value-commitments. Members' complementary obligations to the societal community constitute the obverse expectations of contribution to the functioning of a social system to which they are committed.

In a sense, the "pay-off" on such obligations comes in the relation between the societal community and the political subsystem, that concerned with collective goal-attainment as a function of the total society and, pari passu of each subsystem grounded in communal solidarity. This relation concerns a further step toward mastering exigencies in the interest of the implementation of values. It is a matter, not just of establishing particular relationships of solidarity as the "setting" for value-implementation, but, further, of committing the interests of that community to particular collective goals - which involves dealing with the exigencies of particular environmental conditions. For the individual, this then concerns, not merely his personal commitment to the goal, but his obligations as a member of the community. Committing the community implies a solution to the problem of integrating the community with reference to the "policy" in question, whether this involves developing a broad consensus or ruthlessly suppressing minority, or even majority views. As a somewhat extreme case, entering a war commits the national community, whatever various membership elements think about it, short of their mustering a resistance which would favour the enemy cause.
Here, as in the relation of the national community to the "cultural" subsystem, two importantly different levels are involved. One concerns the general "authority" of differentiated elements in the society to commit - or bind - the collectivity as a whole in the pursuit of particular goals in particular situations. One extreme in this context would be an absolutist or despotic "government" which presumed to act as it pleased regardless of consent or opposition in the broader societal community. An opposite extreme would be a community which made any action dependent on virtually unanimous consent.

By differentiating the two levels, modern governmental systems avoid being caught in the above dilemma. They set up procedural rules defining the level of support needed to authorize collective action binding the collectivity as a whole, including minorities that dissent in various contexts. For this to work, the minorities must be committed to the legitimacy of the governmental system, even though they refuse to support particular policy decisions of the moment.

For the individual (or political minority groups), however, such situations may present a moral dilemma. In his rôle as a responsible member of the societal community, which includes an obligation to support its government (not particular decisions or parties), the member of a minority position is, up to a point, obligated not only to accept, but often also to co-operate actively in implementing a policy of which he disapproves. There may, however, be a point beyond which his conscience will not allow this. He will then be driven into various levels of resistance, ranging from withdrawal of active participation, through public protest, conspicuous non-co-operation, and militant attempts to prevent or sabotage its implementation, to revolution.

The development of political differentiation and pluralism, including the generalization of the crucial levels of political obligation, tends to broaden the range of individual freedom for dissent, and also draw the lines between politically institutionalized - as distinguished from moral - rights of dissent and opposition and those institutionally defined as illegitimate. The basic independence of the cultural-moral and the socially institutionalized systems, however, precludes any societal community from being completely immune to the kind of political opposition which can lead to the disruption of its basic solidarity.

The element of mechanical solidarity here concerns the legitimation of collective decision-making authorities. Such legitimation must derive from common value-commitments to the societal community, and hence to the kinds of collective action considered legitimate, including the identification of the agencies entitled to take such action. Obversely, this also concerns the rights of membership elements to give or withhold support for particular policies and, more generally, particular claims to leadership status. The appeals for such support, however, must be on grounds of organic rather than mechanical solidarity. The procedural rules become the focus of common commitments, while particular outcomes become matters for legitimate contest.

At this point, we may recall that Durkheim introduced the concept of organic solidarity in analysing the division of labour in the economic sense. This was quite logical in the light, both of the utilitarian theories to which he was critically orienting himself and of the economy's relative remoteness from the setting of the system of mechanical solidarity, as that has just been discussed. Focus on it was the most convenient way to set up a clear conceptual dichotomy.
Nevertheless, it now seems better to approach the problem of the economic system indirectly, through its relations to the other aspects of a social system. We conceive the economy as the functional subsystem of a society differentiated about producing and allocating fluidly disposable resources within the society. As put in a quite familiar paradigm, it operates through "combing" the factors of production, e.g. land, labour, capital, and organization, to produce the two primary categories of output, commodities, and services. The economic categories are not the physical objects or the physical behaviour involved, as such, but certain ways of controlling them: in the case of commodities, essentially property rights; in the case of services, the kind of authority or power over the performer we associated with the status of employment.

The actual combinatorial processes, which we call economic production, take place in goal-oriented organizational units which economists call firms. The strictly economic functions concern the management of the boundary-relations of these units through what is ordinarily called the market system, and should be distinguished from the technological functions. They involve procuring control of the factors of production (including determination of requirements for them) and disposing of the outputs of production through "marketing". These processes operate by adjusting relations between supply and demand through establishing terms for the transfer of control which equate quantity and price for both parties to the exchange.

Here the primary institutional focus of organic solidarity is the institution of contract, which is essentially the set of procedural rules regulating transfers of both factors of production and economic outputs. This institutional complex not only regulates the actual settlement of contracts, but also defines what types of contract may - and may not - be entered into, how agreements may be arrived at, their bearing on the interests of third parties, and the obligations of parties under various special contingencies, such as the development of unforeseen obstacles to the fulfilment of terms.

The institution of property, then, is the normative system regulating acquisition, disposal, control, and use of physical objects in relation to the contractual system, whether the objects be factors of production or commodity outputs. And the institutional complex we call employment regulates the acquisition and utilization of human services, either as factors of production or as ultimate agents of valuable consumption.

In sufficiently developed and differentiated systems, a central rôle in economic process is played by money, as both a symbolic medium of exchange and a measure and store of value in the economic sense. Money may be defined as the capacity of a societal unit to command economically valuable resources through the exchange process, i.e. through contractual agreements, without giving commodities or services in return. The "payment" of money constitutes the transfer of such capacity from one unit to another. In most transactions in a developed economy, entities with "value in use" figure on only one side of an exchange relationship, being balanced by a monetary "consideration" on the other. To "pay" money is to accept certain economic obligations, defined by a proportionate diminution in one's capacity to command economic "values" in other transactions. To accept money in payment, on the other hand, is to gain the right to an expectation that others will make economically valuable goods and services available at the times and
places of one's own choosing, within the limits defined in the market Nexus. It has long been a commonplace of economics that only a far-reaching institutionalization of the monetary mechanism can make an extended division of labour possible\(^1\) though it is known that politically controlled, administrative allocation of resources can substitute for the contractual-monetary mechanisms up to a point, as in the "command" economy of Soviet Russia which reached \(^2\) its highest development in the late Stalinist period.\(^3\) Nevertheless, the extent of an economy's "monetization" is undoubtedly the most important single index of the mobilizability of its resources, and hence the flexibility of their allocation, at all combinatorial stages from ultimate natural resources and human energies or skills to "finished" consumption goods and services.

Money is also important theoretically as the best understood member of the family of generalized symbolic media of interchange involved in social interaction processes. Political power and influence as used in political leadership processes certainly belong to this family.\(^3\) This seemed to be the best context for introducing the concept of a generalized medium; the non-monetary media will be discussed further below.

The economy, as here conceived, articulates with the societal community primarily through the institutional complex of contract, property, and the employment occupation system. Its solidarity is maintained by keeping its transactions "in line" with certain integrative imperatives, e.g. by protecting the interests both of parties to contractual relations and third parties and by providing a basis in solidarity relations for effective collective action, especially through making economic resources available to collective units, including particularly "the government".

Money, like the other members of the family of media to which I have referred, is a symbolic medium, which, without being too far fetched, we may call a specialized language. Like all such media, it expresses and communicates "messages" having meanings with reference to a code, a set of rules for the use, transformation, and combination of symbols.\(^4\) In the case of money, as institutionalized, it is highly important to recognize that the relevant code is part of the legal system, most clearly in societies having a sufficiently high level of differentiation. As we have put it, the institutions of contract, property, and employment, as parts of the legal system, constitute the code in terms of which transformations between


money and commodities or services and among different forms of monetary assets operate. "Transactions", therefore, constitute a certain type of "conversations".

This paradigm is also applicable to relations between the societal community and the other primary functional subsystems of the society. In the case of the polity, the medium which corresponds to money is power. (1) This I conceive as the generalized medium of mobilizing capacities for effective collective action, utilizable by members of collectivities to contribute toward binding the collectivity to particular courses of action, either determining or contributing to the implementation of specific policy goals. The code within which power as a medium operates centres about the institution of authority, which in turn articulates with the patterns of "institutionalized leadership" and "administrative" responsibility for maintaining regulatory norms.

In the sphere of articulation with the cultural system, the operative medium is what I call commitments. This concerns the specification of the general value-patterns to the levels necessary for their workable combination with the other factors requisite to their implementation in concrete action. Commitment to valued associations of the societal community type is the prototype here. (2) The relevant code is the set of institutions which constitute the underpinning of society's mechanical solidarity, in our society those formulated in the Bill of Rights, etc., as noted. Within this context, the civil component holds precedence, as it formulates the valutational basis of community membership.

Finally, the societal community itself is the focus of operation for a fourth generalized medium, which I have called, in a special technical sense, influence. (3) Here the relevant code is comprised of the norms underlying organic solidarity, as they relate to the pluralistic structure of differentiated societies. Since their primary context is that of the solidarity of the society, we may consider their major focus to be justification for the allocation of loyalties. Here justification must be carefully distinguished from legitimation. It is less absolute and operates at a lower level in the cybernetic hierarchy. The system may well be legitimated while questions of the justification of certain choices between alternative subsidiary solidarities are still left open where actual or potential dilemmas are posed.

These different code components are, more or less adequately, integrated in a going societal system, constituting its basic normative structure. They should be distinguished from the primary normative components of a pattern-maintenance system, comprised of value-patterns and their specifications, not differentiated norms. Normatively, the integratively oriented code of the societal system must be anchored, for its basis of legitimation, in a value system. But its structure is not determined by value-specification alone, but also by "adjustment" to the exigencies of the other functional subsystems - while still retaining certain levels of integrity of value-commitment and solidarity of the societal community. This basic code system is the core of the legal system in highly differentiated societies.

(1) This involves the usage of the concept of political power which is clearly different from those most common in both sociology and political science. I cannot take space to discuss the issues here. See my article, "On the Concept of Political Power", cited above.

(2) Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to develop for publication an analysis of the operation of the commitments medium on the same level as has been done for money, power, and influence.

(3) Talcott Parsons: "On the Concept of Influence", op. cit.
We may now return to the problem of the relations between a society as a social system and its environments. The basis of the differentiation between the societal community and the other three primary subsystems of the society relates to the base on which they in turn are differentiated from it and from each other. The most general answer to the "why" of these patterned differentiations is that they facilitate coping with the exigencies imposed by the environments of the social system.

Perhaps we had best begin with the economy, in dealing with this problem, partly because the relevant theoretical analysis is most highly developed there. In the terms of our general paradigm, the intra-social relation between societal community and economy is paralleled at the level of the general action system by the relation between the social system and the behavioural organism.

Very essentially, all relations between the social system and the physical environment are mediated through the behavioural organism. The perceptual processes of the organism are the source of information about the physical environment, which gains cultural organization from its conceptual and theoretical components. The organism is also the source of the "instinctual" components of the motivation of individuals' personalities.

The relation between the organism and the society's economic subsystem which is of direct concern here constitutes the technological system. This involves the utilization of empirical knowledge, structured by perceptual feed-back through the cultural system, for the design and production of commodities having utility for human social functions. What is to be produced, in what quantities relative to alternative uses of the factors of production (cost factors), is economically determined; how it is to be produced is a technological problem. Technology involves not only the use of ultimate "natural" resources (analytically a "land" factor) and "equipment" (a benefit from previous production), but also labour as a factor which sociologically takes the form of service. This is a particularly important category of the interpenetration between the economy and other parts of the societal system. We conceive it as an output from the economy which "corresponds" to labour as a factor of production, but which should definitely not be identified with labour. Very importantly, however, service is a crucial factor in technological efficiency. This apparently paradoxical conception derives from the fact that technological processes always occur within a framework of social organization, never as "purely" physical phenomena. This means that the physical, behavioural operations of persons in technological settings are a function of their commitments as members of the societal community and its relevant subsystems to devote their energy and skill to productive uses in the economic sense. This "human" component is then combined, at the general action system level, with empirical knowledge and standards of socio-economic utility to produce facilities which can be relatively freely allocated to the various functional needs of societal units. Analyses in these terms can contribute much toward resolving the old controversy, whether the "material" basis of complex societal system is "ultimately" economic or technological, or whether distinctions between these categories should be abandoned.

Physical location is a particularly important involvement of technological systems, deriving from the necessity to bring together organisms as performers of service, physical materials, plant, and equipment. Role-differentiation between the occupational and residential units tends to bring a physical separation of
the premises of residence and of work, though the involvement of the same persons in both units sets certain requirements for the physical interrelations of their locations. In particular, the modern urban community is very largely built about the relationship between these two sets of locations.

Residence, like occupation, also articulates physical location and the organism into the social system. But it operates in the context that human beings are bound to the organic rhythms involved in sleep and nutrition—and also sexual activity—and that the usual unit of residence (though, of course, there are many exceptions), the household, has kinship units at its core, centering about one or more nuclear families. The place of residence is the human individual's residual location, the place where he is likely to be, and is often normatively expected to be, when he is not engaged in such other specific activities as work or special recreation.

Communication and transportation—of both goods and persons—therefore require physical media, and must be involved in the physical world, perhaps especially its spatial aspects. The actual communication of a message from a sender in one physical location to a receiver in another is always problematic, even if the two are engaged in face-to-face conversation in the same room. The same is true of broadcast communication—newspapers must get from the printing plant to the reader, radio and television broadcasts must be transmitted through the "air" and the conveyance of persons and goods from place to place.

In certain senses the most fundamental problem here, though, is that the normative orders constitutive of social systems must "apply" to categories of persons and their acts in ways including specifications of "where" the persons or acts are located. Very generally, then, the social community and various of its subsystems claim "jurisdiction" over persons and their acts with reference to particular territorial areas. A most important reason for the prominence of territoriality is that normative obligations, if taken sufficiently seriously, must on occasion be somehow enforced, and this involves resort at some point to physical negative sanctions, which can only be applied to the non-compliant individual's organism where he is. This, in turn, obviously includes enforcing claims to the jurisdiction over, and the utilization of resources within, an area, and hence a readiness to enforce respect for such control upon outsiders, i.e. the function of defense. (1)

Thus, spatial location is involved in all the functions of social systems. Its articulation with social processes, is what we ordinarily call the ecological aspect of the system, the distribution of its various activities in physical space and their orientation to spatial considerations. In principle, all other analytically distinguishable aspects of physical systems are comparably involved with social interaction, but the foregoing will have to serve for illustration.

The core of the social system, the societal community, relates to the physical environment primarily through two mediating systems, the economy, which is primarily social but which interpenetrates with the technological system, and the technological system, which is primarily organic-physical but which interpenetrates with the economy. Organic-physical factors then operate in all the

There is parallel complexity at the other end of the cybernetic hierarchy in which action, and hence social, systems are involved. A society, or any other type of social system, has a pattern-maintenance subsystem, the units of which (once the system is sufficiently differentiated) have cultural primacy. These social system units, then, interpenetrate with both the societal community (and other societal subsystems) and with the cultural system proper. With progressing differentiation, they tend to become distinctively different according to whether their primacy "concern" is cultural or social.

Religion comprises the matrix from which cultural institutions in general have differentiated, and remains the "master" system in the cybernetic sense. But secular intellectual disciplines (science), arts in the expressive-symbolic sense, and normative disciplines (e.g. ethics and law) have gained differentiation from it.

This formulates very briefly the main lines of internal differentiation of a cultural system. The pattern-maintenance system, however, is not a cultural system in a strict sense (though for simplification the distinction has not always been made in this article), but the subsystem of the social system articulating most closely with the cultural system. Religion as a cultural phenomenon is not part of the pattern-maintenance system. Rather, the relevant structure is the collective organization of religious orientations, e.g. in "churches", or in prophetic movements. Science as a body of knowledge is cultural; universities as collectivities organized about the development of science through research and about its communication through teaching are parts of the society. Pattern-maintenance structures in this connexion have cultural primacy just in that their societal functions concern interchange with the cultural system, and in that they interpenetrate with the latter. Thus, religious orientations or scientific "systems of knowledge" are constitutive parts of churches and universities, not only "environments" to them.

Just as man has no direct contact with the physical world independent of the organism (which, however, is itself part of that world), so he has no direct contact with the ultimate non-empirical "grounds" of his existence, what Weber called the world of "ultimate realities". His objects in this realm, to which he "orients" himself, are not the ultimate entities "as such", but his "representations" of them. They are cultural objects - parts of the cultural system in the action sense - and hence interpenetrate with all the other subsystems of action.

As structures of such interpenetration, "theological schools" or "prophetic movements", though quite distinct from religion as a component of the culture, are cultural subsystems of the society having religious primacy, but also interpenetrating into churches or other forms of the social institutionalization of religion. Or, legal schools, as companies of legal scholars, are cultural subsystems, whereas courts of law are the social system units in which legal doctrines, which are comprised of cultural content, are "applied" to social situations. In the more strictly cognitive disciplines, "companies of scholars" constitute cultural subsystems, which often involve "schools" at the level of cultural content, whereas universities and other educational collectivities constitute the articulated social system units.
For certain purposes, we may as above legitimately equate the pattern-maintenance subsystem of a society with the cultural system, since its primary function is articulating the social system as such - that constituted by social interaction - with cultural patterns and norms. This, however, is elliptical. In the first instance, there are the more complex relationships just sketched. But there is also a further complication. Any system of cultural content, particularly a value system, must be specified from the most general relevant levels to levels relevant to the highly particular functions and exigencies of many and various subsystems. For instance, every technological system producing a particular commodity has its special exigencies which the general principles of the relevant science cannot handle alone, similarly, every medical case is in some sense unique, and the physician must tailor his general medical knowledge to its specificities.

One special set of exigencies of human societies has a special bearing here. This concerns the consequences of the fact that culture is learned by the human individual, not part of his hereditary equipment. If a given society is defined by its institutionalization of certain cultural patterns, then the necessity of internalizing those patterns in the oncoming generation is second in functional importance only to maintenance of the adult levels of that culture. This functional imperative evidently underlies the functioning of kinship institutions in all known human societies and at higher levels of differentiation, of many kinds and levels of formal education.

This whole subsystem of institutions, as well as those involved with cultural innovation (e.g. research organization), should be included in the pattern-maintenance subsystem of a society, characterized by primary interpenetration with the cultural system of action. Kinship, however, having special reference to child care, is the substructure of the pattern-maintenance system that operates with the farthest remove from the considerations of the general culture.(1) Furthermore, it also relates quite specially, not only to the society, but also to the exigencies of both organism and personality, about which a few words must now be said.

The personality, as analytically distinguished from the organism, constitutes the third primary environment of a social system. It interpenetrates with the individual organism in the obvious and fundamental sense that the storage facilities of learned content must be organic, as must the physical mechanisms of perception and cognition, of the control of learned behaviour, and of the bases of motivation.

At the level of this discussion, however, the personality forms a distinct system articulated with social systems through their political subsystems, not simply in the sense of government but of any collective ordering. This is to say that the primary goal-output of social systems is to the personalities of their members. Although they interpenetrate crucially with social systems, the personalities of individuals are not core institutions of social systems (nor vice versa), but precisely environments of them. Freud, especially in his later work, was quite clear about the obverse relationship, namely that the individual personality's primary environment consists of the social system(s) into which it becomes integrated - the famous "reality principle" is the principle of ego-adaptation to the social environment.

(1) At the appropriate level of specification of values, however, it has cultural primacy.
I am treating the personality last among the primary environments of the social system because, of the three, it is least commonly conceptualized as such. This conceptualization directly counters the long tradition that a society is "composed" or "made up" of "individuals". The latter may be true if the society and the individual are conceived as concrete entities. Here, however, social system and personality - the concrete term individual is avoided in this context - are used as abstractly defined systems which are distinguished analytically, though allowance is made for the crucial relation of interpenetration. The unit of interpenetration between a personality and a social system is not the individual, but a rôle or complex of rôles. The same personality may participate in several social systems in different rôles. Indeed, this even applies to societies. (1)

From the viewpoint of the psychology of the personality, the positive outputs from the social system are rewards. Indeed, I would even say that, at the level of cultural symbolization, except for intermediate cases specially involved at the crux of differentiation between organism and personality, notably erotic pleasure, all rewards are social system outputs. Conversely, outputs from the personality to the social system are personal goal-achievements which, from the viewpoint of the receiving social system, are contributions to its functioning, in so far as the two systems are integrated with each other.

The focus of such integration is the phenomenon of "identification", through which the personality acquires a motivationally and cognitively meaningful rôle-set and the social system acquires a "member" who can make meaningful contributions. Malintegration means that this matching relationship has failed in one way or another - "deviance", "alienation", and a variety of other phenomena fit in this category. It is also crucial to allow for personal creativity in relation to the social system. The analytical independence of social system and personality is the basic origin of both the prevalence of deviant behaviour and the openings for creativity. The frequent allegation that sociology teaches the necessity of flat "conformity" is a conspicuous case of the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. If our analytical generalizations about social systems "applied" without qualification to all the member personalities, this would be the case. The mutual independence of the two categories of system - though accounting for their interdependence and interpenetration - is the theoretical basis for the fundamental and general phenomenon of the autonomy of the individual, so far as the social system is concerned.

Two important considerations reinforce this assertion of the reality of personal autonomy - the degree and kinds of which must be seen as varying with different types of social system. First, analytically, apart from its direct relation to the social system, the personality system is the primary meeting ground of the cultural system, the behavioural organism, and, secondarily, the physical world. Although there have been serious theoretical difficulties with the "Culture and Personality" studies of the last generation in behavioural science, they did focus upon a crucial relationship here, as did the "behaviouristic" traditions of psychology in studying the interrelations of personality and organism. Hence, it can be said that, not only is the personality autonomous as a distinct subsystem of action, but also that this autonomy is importantly grounded in the personality's interchanges with the cultural and organic levels of the organization of action. These three sets of considerations (plus the uniqueness of the genetic constitution of practically every human organism) go far in explaining the irreducibility of the distinctiveness of all human personalities, as well as their autonomy.

(1) It is not useful to speak of the International Sociological Association as "part" of American society, yet I, while a "member" of the American societal community, can also participate in the ISA.
The second consideration derives from an internal feature of social systems, what is generally called "rôle-pluralism". That is, not only do individuals have plural rôle-involvements, but also different individuals' combinations of rôle-participations vary widely. Such variance includes complexes of differing rôles which are often categorized together for limited purposes. Thus, one "middle-class suburban mother" may have one child, another three, and another five, and the assortments of the children by age and sex may vary, so that even "being a mother" is not an identical thing for each member of that category, even sociologically. To this we can add differences in occupation of husbands, religion, ethnicity, participation in community affairs, etc.

When so many mutually independent - though also interdependent - factors are operating, anyone familiar with the logic of combinatorial variability should find it difficult to maintain that a modern, highly differentiated society is incompatible with individuality. Of course, there are also matters of the specific kinds of autonomy and individuality which are at stake. However, the arguments alleging that modern societies are repressive of all autonomy and stifling of all individuality are frequently so overgeneralized that they appear to deny altogether the combinatorial argument just outlined. Furthermore, a strong case can be made that the trend of modern society, because it has become so highly differentiated and pluralistic, is positively to favour individuality rather than to suppress it in favour of "conformism".

We have confined our attention here to human level social systems, and have emphasized the importance of the symbolic systems, which we call cultural, that become constitutive of them through being involved in action and interpenetrating with social systems. Perhaps the most general matrix of these symbolic systems is language. On various levels, there is great familiarity with the concept of symbolic systems, e.g. of "ideas" having a predominantly cognitive focus and of "expressive symbols" in the arts and ritual.

In conclusion, we may carry a little farther the discussion introduced above, of another category of symbolic systems, one which emerges into great prominence in highly differentiated social systems, namely the media of interchange. Attention was called above to money as the medium of exchange in economic transactions. Though the science of economics has gone far in understanding the vastly complex phenomena of monetary systems, they have generally been considered as unique. I have suggested that money is not unique in either of two senses.

First, it can be considered a special case of a very general phenomenon, namely language. It is in fact a very highly specialized language. Crucial here is the recognition that it operates at the symbolic level, and that its primary function is communication, though of a special, normative sort. The "monetary system" is as noted a code in the grammatical-syntactical sense. The circulation of money is the "sending" of messages which give the recipient capacity to command goods and services through market channels. The recipient gains the expectation that he can "request", by virtue of his holding money, access to goods and services of a given value. There is an institutionalized obligation on those receiving such requests - if they are "in business" - to comply. But the process of money circulation involves literally "nothing" except communicated messages. A cheque is "only" a filled-in form letter to the bank on which it is drawn.
Secondly, money is the only specialized language of this sort operating in social systems. Political power is certainly another. It centres about the use of discretionary authority in collective organizations to make decisions which, as binding on the collectivity, require performances of those who are obligated to further their implementation. Not only executive decisions constitute uses of power in this sense, but also the exercise of franchises in many connexions, from voting in governmental elections to voting as a member of a small committee. A third generalized symbolic medium is influence. By this I mean, quite technically, the capacity to achieve "consensus" with other members of an associated group though persuasion without having to give fully adequate "reasons" - adequate in that they give the recipient sufficient information for making a "rational" decision himself or in that the reasons are fully understandable to the recipient. Thus, a physician, as a technical specialist, may persuade a patient to follow his advice even when it is out of the question that the patient competently understands its technical grounds. The patient must, as members of the profession often put it, have "confidence" in his physician. Fourth is the medium of generalized commitments to the implementation of cultural values, at the level of the social system as such. It is the most difficult to conceptualize, and the least can be said about it.

The need for generalized media of interchange is a function of the differentiatedness of social structures; in this sense they are all partly integrative mechanisms. The relations between markets and money and the division of labour is well known, but similar considerations apply in the other cases.

In the political case, the necessity for the mechanism of power stems from the social status "distance" between the loci of decision-making and the loci of the performances necessary for the implementation of the decisions. In complex organizations, it is not realistically possible for decision-makers to consult in detail with every person upon whose "compliance" effective implementation of their decisions depends. This may involve reasons of time urgency, technical considerations, access to special information, or various exigencies of co-ordination. Thus, elections must lead to a concentration of power in the hands of the candidates elected. There cannot, however, be a simple consensus between all the members of the electorate and the preferred candidate - this would be incompatible with the voter's freedom of choice. Hence, binding decisions must be used by the particular voter, that he prefers X candidate over Y - if enough voters do likewise, X will be elected. The electoral authorities are obligated to comply with the aggregate of decisions of the voters.

In the case of influence, the functional need involves bridging certain gaps between the bases of accepting "advice" (in the sense of attempts to persuade without either situational inducements or threats of coercive sanctions) and the intrinsically cogent "reasons" for such acceptance. Complex communities cannot wait for fully "rational" demonstrations of the advisability of all commitments. Therefore, they must rely on influence, or we sometimes say "prestige", as utilized by persons in responsible roles. The user of influence creates a presumption for the reasonableness of his case, so that the object of his attempts at persuasion feels, in the integrated case, reasonably sure in "trusting" him.

Commitments are, similarly, "given" to others when an individual enters into a situation (i.e. makes, or more appropriately, gives a commitment) without in fact being fully able to ensure that the process of action implementation will be carried
out in a manner to preserving or enhancing the integrity of his values. Thus, in a sense different from that of the influence context, he has either to "trust" others or sacrifice the prospect of successful implementation. In turn, others must trust him to gain fulfilment of their commitments. It is in this sense that commitments may be considered a "circulating" medium.

These media appear in generalized and differentiated form only when relatively high levels of differentiation in the relevant spheres have been attained. Primitive societies never have money and market systems, and many "archaic" societies have them only rudimentarily, if at all. What Weber called "patriarchal" political structures do not have power as a generalized medium, and "patrimonial" regimes show only its first emergence.

Other generalized media seem to operate in the zones of interpenetration between the social system and the other primary subsystems of action. As already noted, what Freud called erotic pleasure is, at the same time, organic, a component of the personality, and, because of its involvement with interpersonal relations, a component of certain elementary social systems. What psycho-analytic and other social psychologists have called affect is probably another such mechanism, operating among persons in the interchange between the personality and social systems, rather than in direct relation to the organism. The two famous "wishes", for recognition and for response, discussed by W.I. Thomas perhaps designate still another medium which, however, may be a sub-division of the more general mechanism of affect. In the organic-physical set of relations, technological "know-how" and skill is probably well regarded in this way.

Another set of media operate in the zone of interpenetration between the social and cultural systems. Ideology is a conspicuous example. The concept conscience, as used in Puritan traditions, especially, seems to belong in this category. Reputation, as that term is used in discussing the social structure of scientific communities, is probably another case. The concept Faith, as used in Christian tradition, especially Protestantism, probably refers to a generalized mechanism peculiar to the cultural level of action-organization.

The relative salience of the various generalized media of interchange - and particular cases within them - for specific structures - is a useful guide to the structural arrangements among and within the subsystems of more generalized social systems, notably societies.

We have claimed that the core of a society is the societal community, which, functionally regarded, is the integrative subsystem. It interpenetrates and interchanges directly with each of the other primary subsystems, the pattern-maintenance or cultural-primary subsystem, the goal-attainment subsystem or polity, and the adaptive subsystem or economy. The medium focal to the societal community is influence, which is interchangeable for power, money, and value-commitments.

Each of the other three subsystems constitutes a zone of primary interpenetration and interchange between the social system and one of its intra-action environments. The economy interchanges with the organic-physical environment, and money, in a sufficiently differentiated economy, can be used in exchange for the factors of production, which are then also technologically combined. Though a modern economy is structured primarily about financial institutions and market systems, these latter interpenetrate, in turn, with the technological organizations of production.
The polity interpenetrates, in the first instance, with the personality. Power, as the medium having political primacy, can be used to acquire both human services and the demands for collective action which justify leadership initiative. Underlying these two forms of "mobile" human resources are the processes which generate and stabilize them. Here the interpenetration between social system and personality leads toward both the psychological "depths" of the personality and the relational contexts articulating the basic integration of social systems. Above all, family and kinship, neighbourhood and education, fit this context, but also such complexes as recreation. These operate, however, at a level quite different from the direct interchanges between personality and polity - for macrosocial purposes they should be treated as pattern-maintenance processes.

Finally, the interpenetration between social and cultural systems concerns, most saliently, the place of religion in relation to social structure. Indeed, the primary structures of the most primitive societies fall almost entirely into the two basic categories of kinship and religion. With further differentiation, however, religion becomes more and more clearly distinguished from political organization, and partly from economic structuring, which tends, though, to remain ascribed to both kinship and, above all, the polity, in the broad, analytical sense.

In rather advanced societies, the cultural system itself begins to differentiate, particularly through the appearance of secular cultural disciplines. Thus, law in close relation to ethical philosophy, the arts, as something other than a direct handmaiden of religion, and, generally last, science have become independent cultural realms - though they are always also interdependent and interpenetrating with each other and with the social system. Value-commitments constitute the principal societal medium operating in this realm, though various others are involved secondarily. A modern society, then, contains a considerable number of structural units having cultural primacy. Religious collectivities need hardly be mentioned, so conspicuous are they from any comparative point of view. Increasingly, modern societies have universities, which institutionalize the intellectual disciplines that are in some sense sciences, various organizations focusing upon the arts, and the very crucial institutions of highly generalized law, with their articulations to ethics.

The social system is, thus, a very complex entity. As an organization of human interests, activities, and commitments, it must be viewed as a system and in functional perspective. This is the key to its lines of organization, its modes of differentiation, and its integration. Such a system may be considered as both structure and process, in different aspects and for different scientific purposes. Structurally, we have suggested that there is a double basis of systematizing differentiation and variation, namely that internal to the primary social system itself and that involved in its relations to its primary environments, as analysed with reference to the general system of action. Processually, the categories of analysis must follow from and integrate with those of structure. We suggest that, given the central position of language as definitive of human society, the more differentiated and specialized symbolic media of interchange constitute the master-scheme for the systematic analysis of social system process.