SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

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Preface

Since the appearance of *Social Institutions* in 1929, a considerable amount of scientific attention has been paid to the study of this block of social phenomena. The body of basic theory has greatly expanded. This present study, while it started out to be a revision, is essentially a new presentation of systematized and co-ordinated contemporary information in the subject, though some of the material which is still significant as well as some of the general organization of the old book has been retained.

This book will not appeal particularly to the headline readers or the searchers for sensational or lurid pathological details. Nor is it an attempt to portray the statistical characteristics, or to appraise the particular virtues or defects or other "problem" aspects of the more pertinent contemporary institutions, or to produce a handbook for reformist purposes, laudable as these objectives may be. Rather it is intended to accompany such treatments and establish for them a theoretical foundation, in the sense that sound, systematized theory is the indispensable basis for all comprehension and application. This book is for those students of the social sciences who wish some knowledge of the coherent factual material, the principles, the criteria, the conceptual structures, and the analytical categories relating to the *normal* operation of that great social mechanism, human society, of which all individuals and groups are functional parts, and especially of those universal and all-important group behavior patterns known as social institutions.

Until we have a clear notion of the nature of social institutions and their functional place in the social system—their causes, functions, composition, implementation, relationships, and the effects upon them of various internal and external changes—all discussion of them is so much persiflage, however arduously and sincerely men may engage in it. To make such an objective, theoretical analysis properly, however, since institutions are not isolated phenomena, we must wrestle not only with the concepts and tasks of social organization, societal maintenance, social control, culture, human ecology, social change, especially social processes, and social reorganization, but also with social values and many other of the established facts and principles of sociology and the related social sciences, not to mention problems of methodology and prediction. Therefore, the book in a sense is an introduction to social

theory as well as a detailed analytical treatment of social institutions.

As a "sociological" study the materials have not been drawn from any single historical epoch or any single culture area. However, unless specific mention is made to the contrary, American society will be the center of interest.

Almost limitless bibliographies of materials dealing directly or indirectly with one or more points raised in each chapter could have been compiled. Frequently such compilations reveal great assiduity as collections but do not assist the reader markedly in understanding the subject. Actually the materials dealing pertinently and systematically with the aspects of institutions as outlined in each chapter of the present book, with a few exceptions, are relatively scarce. Those here given in connection with each chapter are to readily available sources and have a direct bearing upon the subject matter or lead to profitable excursions from the subject. The works cited should be read as part of the treatment.

To my students of the last two decades who have participated at least indirectly in this development of the subject, to colleagues who have discussed the content with me, and to those numerous observers and analysts, both those cited and those now unknown ones from whom through the years I have absorbed varied lore relating to the field of institutions, I express my obligation. I am also grateful for editorial and other valued suggestions and assistance to Miss Emily Schossberger, Editor, the Board of Publications, and the other members of the staff of the University of Nebraska Press.

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CONTENTS

I.

The Place of an Analysis of Social Institutions in Social Theory

In the theory of human society it is necessary that there be a body of definite data and principles regarding the responses of men to various types of recurrent social situations, especially the groupings, relationships and interactions of the members of a society in time and space, and the social mechanisms which define, direct and limit the behavior of individual members in these interactions. Such material of necessity establishes a background and provides a point of departure for all other pertinent societal analyses. The vast concern among social scientists in recent decades with the subject of social change, while extremely profitable and justifiable, has tended to distract the attention of many from the basic subject of the foundations of social order, stability and permanence and the related study of the nature of the minimal functional agencies in any society as a "going concern." The findings of the studies of change, however, emphatically throw into relief the major stabilizing and operative devices of this "concern" if it is to "go."

Any such examination of society points directly to social institutions. In fact, we run into institutions in whatever approach we make to the task of societal analysis, whether it be by way of social structure, of social operation and function, of culture, of individual behavior, of processes and change, of control, of ecology, of values and norms, or even of social problems and pathology. Every feature of human society which comprehends the action of individuals in their contacts with their fellows represents or involves an institution. Their study may be said to focus one of the primary objectives of sociology as a science, which is the acquisition of a knowledge of the means of living and working together in groups.[1] Hence, one of the most

[1] "Because of their relative stability and objectivity . . . the study of institutions is one of the most convenient and fruitful avenues of approach to the formulation of laws of social behavior in general." G. A. Lundberg, *Foundations of Sociology*, N. Y.: Macmillan, 1939, pp. 414–415.

important tasks of further conceptualization, classification and generalization in the field of theoretical sociology relates to social institutions.

Their importance is attested to by the fact that institutions as a whole, as well as selected institutional systems, and even single institutions, have been the subject of elaborate, objective examination by social scientists; social pathologists have devoted much attention to the aberrant aspects of certain strategic contemporary institutions; reformers and reconstructionists of many hues and with many variant objectives are continually attempting to manipulate certain institutions which for them are all-important; predatory individuals and groups always carry on their nefarious activities through captured institutions. Most persons who pay any attention to social affairs view new institutions or new institutional parts or any considerable modification of institutions, whether due to spontaneous or deliberate processes or any loss of institutions as matters of serious concern. Such a basic analysis of institutions is, of necessity, of a theoretical nature; its findings constitute at least a partial theoretical system.

The general frame of reference is the field of social organization, which breaks down into social structure, social order, and social control. The specific frame of reference is the area known as "social institutions"—entities which exist and function within the general areas of social operation.

The conceptualization of institutions has been going on for a long time. The term "social institution" is not only used by the social scientist, but is continuously found in our daily speech and in our current secular and professional literature; it is also one of the most constantly abused words in the language of the social sciences. In the main, however, at present, its usages are not clear-cut or exact. Where these usages are fairly definite, they are frequently at considerable variance with each other; a single root meaning hardly can be said to exist. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the various available concepts among the social scientists themselves are still somewhat uncorrelated, inconsistent and unsystematized. The treatments are in some cases highly individualized, or incidental to the theoretical analysis of some other phase of social theory; they are points of departure for a project of broader implications, or are piecemeal and fragmentary; they are concerned primarily with the institutions of some specific area or era, or as a medium for some methodological demonstration. Assumptions underlie the treatments which are still

not clearly formulated and stated, and gaps still exist in the system of concepts covering social institutions. But uniformity of conceptualization is in process, and a fairly clear "consensus" and integration is now possible.

Many books and articles concerned with social organization, culture or social psychology offer definitions of institutions. These definitions are the condensed and crystallized generalizations of analysts in the field.[2] While they seem to be a "mighty maze," in the maze there is a plan. No two or more definitions of the list indicated give precisely the same conception of social institutions; yet two or more do agree, expressly or by implication, on one or more salient points. This enables us to draw up some sort of composite conception.

Thus institutions are: (1) "apparatus of social life," "modes or organs," "mechanisms," "instruments," "forms of order," and in turn (2) "part of the social structure," "units in the total social organization," "component part of the total structure of a plurality pattern;" they are also, from another angle (3) "human achievements," "forms of culture," "culture complexes," "configurations," "accumulations of social capital," (with the elements or "traits" composing them occasionally set forth) and they have "considerable permanence, universality;" (4) they meet "some persistent need or want," "supply the fundamental needs of human beings," "are necessary to the satisfaction of basic needs," "center around the achievement of some human end or purpose," "do collectively the things that are right and proper with respect to some particular aspect of life," guide "the individual into

[2] For representative definitions see: L. T. Hobhouse, *Social Development,* London: Allen & Unwin, 1924, pp. 48–49; R. M. MacIver, *Community,* London: Macmillan, 1924, pp. 153–154; R. M. MacIver, *Society,* N. Y.: Farrar & Rinehart, 1937, p. 15; L. von Wiese & H. Becker, *Systematic Sociology,* N. Y.: Wiley, 1932, p. 402; R. C. Angell in C. H. Cooley, R. C. Angell & L. J. Carr, *Introductory Sociology,* N. Y.: Scribners, 1933, pp. 402–404; R. C. Angell, *The Integration of American Society,* N. Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1941, p. 25; L. F. Ward, *Pure Sociology,* N. Y.: Macmillan 1907, p. 31; C. Wissler, *Man and Culture,* N. Y.: Crowell, 1923, pp. 73–74; C. H. Cooley, *Social Organization,* N. Y.: Scribners, 1915, p. 313; C. A. Ellwood, *Psychology of Human Society,* N. Y.: Appleton-Century, 1925, pp. 90–91; W. G. Sumner & A. G. Keller, *The Science of Society,* New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1927, Vol. II, p. 1480; F. H. Allport, *Institutional Behavior,* Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1933, pp. 27–28; F. S. Chapin, *Contemporary American Institutions,* N. Y.: Harpers, 1935, p. xvii; R. T. LaPiere, *Collective Behavior,* N. Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1938, p. 63; W. H. Hamilton, "Institutions," in *Encyc. Soc. Sci.,* N. Y.: Macmillan, 1932, Vol. 8, p. 84; G. A. Lundberg, *Foundations of Sociology,* N. Y.: Macmillan, 1939, p. 375; C. Panunzio, *Major Social Institutions,* N. Y.: Macmillan, 1939, p. 27.

modes of behavior which assist in one way or another in the maintenance of group life;" (5) they take the form of "usages," "forms of social activity," "forms or conditions of procedure," "systems of activities," "systems of controls," "patterns of behavior," "Collective Action," "collective behavior," "patterns of social organization," or, if social psychologically expressed, "phase of the public mind," "states of mind," "configuration of segments of the behaviors of individuals," "patterns of attitudes," "conceptualization of behavior and attitudinal relationships;" (6) these are "established and recognized," "incorporated within the social framework," "systematized," "instituted," "sanctioned," "have attained some measure of formalization and hence of permanence;" (7) "by the authority of communities," or "by some common will," and, finally, (8) they are concretely expressed in "social habits," "overt conduct," "similar and reciprocal habits of individual behavior."

From this we venture a working definition for the present study. Assuming that institutions are accepted as social phenomena, a *reliable* and *useful* definition must reflect the place of institutions in the realm of social phenomena; their nature as a specific form of social phenomenon; their social function; their content or ingredients. Of necessity, a definition that is not piecemeal cannot be a matter of a few words; if it is, it unavoidably ignores various basic data in the concept essential to its understanding.

There is apparently a *bloc* of social phenomena known as institutions. These institutions play an indispensable role in social life as is attested by their universality and variety. They affect all social behavior, and influence all groups and their component persons.

Our working definition follows: Social institutions are purposive, regulatory and consequently primary cultural configurations, formed, unconsciously and/or deliberately, to satisfy individual wants and social needs bound up with the efficient operation of any plurality of persons. They consist of codes, rules and ideologies, unwritten and written, and essential symbolic organizational and material implementations. They evidence themselves socially in standardized and uniform practices and observances, and individually in attitudes and habitual behavior of persons. They are sustained and enforced by public opinion, acting both informally and formally, through specially devised agencies.

Classification is really a form of more detailed description. While it is simply putting together on one's own thought those things

that are essentially alike, it involves at the same time careful observation and logical analysis, and much sorting of and discrimination among facts in an effort to observe resemblances and differences in the nature and function of the phenomenon. Various classifications of institutions exist.[3] A survey of classifications of institutions indicates wide divergence among them as to the bases upon which they are made. The classifications are made from various angles depending upon the particular "slant" of the writer. Occasionally we find a given writer presenting more than one classification. In general the classifications have been made from at least five different points of view, namely, (1) from the viewpoint of the various functions or objectives; (2) from that of the organization of different institutions; (3) from the point of view of scope, general or specific; (4) from that of degrees of the fundamental nature or importance of institutions (primary or secondary); and (5) from the viewpoint of their development or formulation (crescive or enacted, mature or immature). None of the classifications seem to be entirely satisfactory to their authors, however. In almost every case the writers pointed out that their categories run into each other across zones of transition, or that given institutions have to be shifted from one category to another when viewed from some other pertinent angle. No zones are clear-cut; all are blurred. Given institutions in almost any of the classifications can be placed under one category under some circumstances or from some one viewpoint and placed elsewhere under other conditions. It is just possible that no single classification will suffice in a comprehensive, systematic treatment. From one approach we will need to use or develop one form of classification, from another a different one. Thus we may need one classification from the developmental point of view, another from the point of view of content, another from the functional point of view. Each classification as it is used will be illuminating it is hoped in connection with the particular analysis or interpretation that we are undertaking at the moment.

[3] For significant classifications of institutions see: L. F. Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 185–186; W. G. Sumner, *Folkways*, Boston: Ginn, 1906, p. 54; L. von Wiese & H. Becker, *op. cit.*, pp. 402–404; W. G. Sumner & A. G. Keller, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, pp 89–90; E. C. Hughes, "The Ecological Aspect of Institutions," *Am. Soc. Rev.*, 1 (April, 1936): 180–188; F. S. Chapin, *op. cit.*, pp. 13–23, 332–333; H. A. Phelps, *Principles and Laws of Sociology*, N. Y.: Wiley, 1936, pp. 323–324; E. C. Hughes, in R. E. Park (ed.), *An Outline of the Principles of Sociology*, N. Y.: Barnes & Noble, 1939, pp. 289–296; L. L. Bernard, *An Introduction to Sociology*, N. Y.: Crowell, 1942, pp. 878–882.

As will be noted there is considerable agreement regarding the division, for analytical purposes, of institutions themselves into systems according to the more or less separate departments of social life in which they operate. We are also in a position now to give fairly clear-cut and comprehensive classifications of the varied functions and the component parts of institutions and the implementive devices whereby they become actively operative in human groups.

Well-substantiated and reliable generalizations about the place, value, and functions of institutions, as well as their relationships in space and their changes in time are available and others will be launched.

The construction of another "system" of institutional theory is neither necessary nor desirable. Certainly he would be both bold and foolish who conceived of the task of system-making as a one-man job. But some effort at systematizing and synthesizing the vast body of existing and more or less related conclusions and findings regarding institutions is desirable. It is needed not only to clarify and simplify the existing factual and conceptual material about institutions, but also to reveal the gaps which further research will seek to close. It is also desirable to make as many-sided an approach as is possible at this moment, in order to see institutions from the various perspectives from which they are being viewed, even though this unavoidably brings with it some repetition, overlapping and duplication.

No effort should be made to depart too widely from the usages of speech and the concepts of either the "man in the street," the professional sociologists, or the other social scientists. As a matter of fact, except for differences of degree of emphasis on some points, the "man in the street" and the social scientist are not so far apart. Certainly there should be no intention of creating a complete revision of terms and concepts. The purpose should be, primarily, either to eliminate inconsistencies and conflicting usages, or, where possible, to harmonize and systematize them. It may be remarked, parenthetically, that a growing uniformity of usage is in evidence.

In conclusion it may be justifiably contended that the theory of institutions is an analysis both of social process and social structure. It attempts to explain, (1) how and why given societies are moulded in certain patterns; (2) the way in which the patterns of activity and relations of individuals are organized; (3) the nature of the relations between institutions and between individuals and institutions; (4)

the *ethos* of a people, which in turn largely determines the character of its group values, norms, preferences and individual outlooks; (5) the reciprocal relation of the institutions and the peculiar configuration of a culture. In general, it enables the student of society to distinguish and describe the concrete *Gestalt* of a given social-historical situation.[4]

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[4] This paragraph has been largely suggested by R. Mukerjee, *The Institutional Theory of Economics,* London: Macmillan, 1942, pp. 192–195.

II.

The Sociological Setting of Institutions: Interaction, Social Control, Social Organization, Culture

HUMAN society is a vast complex of innumerable forms and processes, causally and reciprocally interrelated and interacting. It exists due to the fact that man is a bio-psychic entity. He, like other animals, is susceptible to, and shares with his fellows, the determining influences of the physical environment: resources, climate, location, and, in part, spatial arrangement. As a biological specimen he must eat regularly to live, and reproduce to survive as a species; he requires the maintenance of certain physical conditions such as shelter, and safety from hazardous physical and biological forces, including other hostile or harmful human beings. As a highly developed social psychic creature man associates with his fellows, communicates with them, is influenced by them in both his inner and overt behavior, has a variety of communicable expressional impulses, and creates an all-pervasive social environment from which he cannot escape, and presumes a supernatural environment about which he continually worries.

ELEMENTAL BACKGROUNDS: CONTACT AND INTERACTION

These omnipresent and omnipotent situations produce forms of inter-human relationship and organization on two levels: the one, symbiotic organization, which consists merely of automatic physical-biological interdependence; the other, social organization, which rests upon communication on the symbolic level.[1] Both are carried on in aggregations or collectivities of persons; both emphasize the conclusion that association or contact and interaction are the fundamental and primitive facts of human life. These two points will be briefly treated.

[1] Cf. R. E. Park, "Symbiosis and Socialization: A frame of Reference for the Study of Society," *A.J.S.*, 45 (July, 1939) : 1–25.