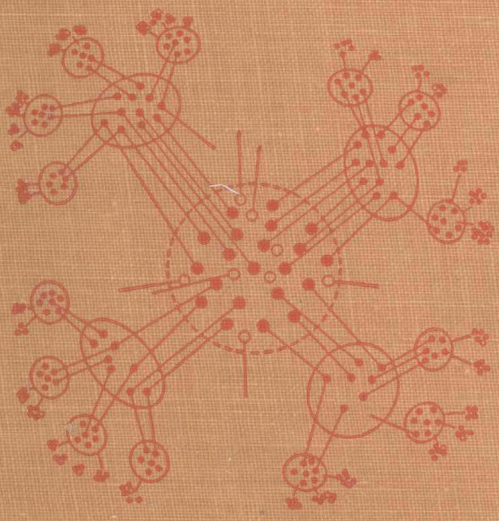
PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS

Neil J. Smelser and William T. Smelser



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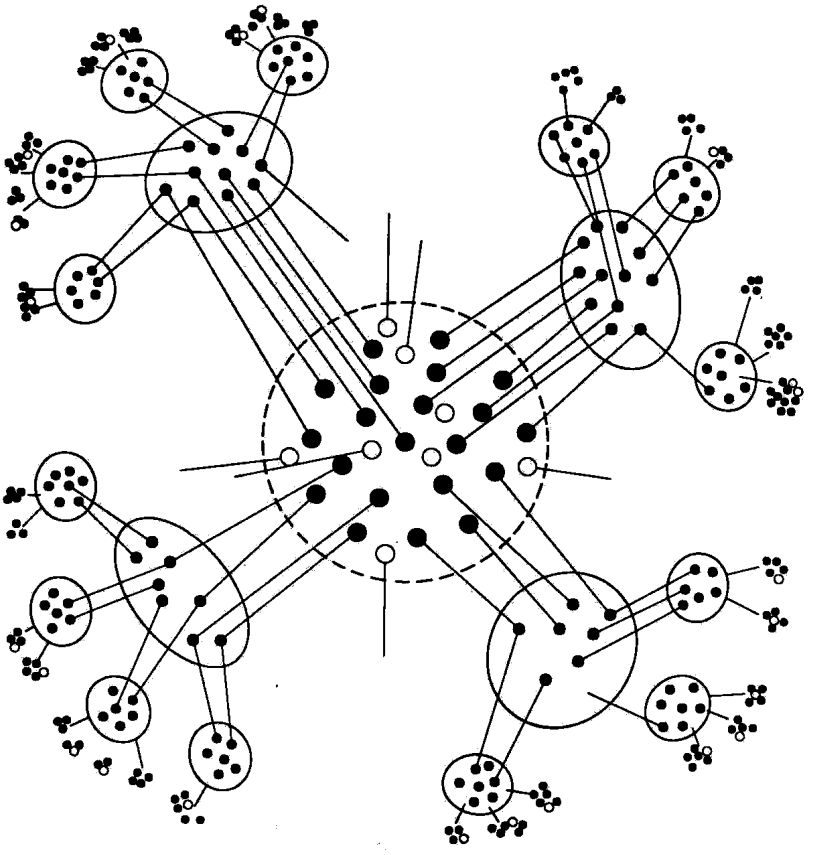

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Preface

WE CONCEIVE this book to have two objectives, one academic and one pedagogic. On the *academic* side, the study of the relations between personality and social systems—like much of social psychology in general—has a "shreds and patches" quality. Many disciplined and theoretically relevant items of research appear in the learned journals, but seldom are they organized systematically. Most books of selected articles reflect this undisciplined character of the field. We hope we have achieved a somewhat tighter conceptual framework in organizing this book of selections. We lay out the broad lines of this framework in the Introduction and attempt to adhere to it consistently in assigning articles to their appropriate place throughout the volume.

On the *pedagogic* side, courses in personality and society sprawl awkwardly over a number of college and university departments—psychology, social psychology, anthropology, and sociology. Teachers from each department view the subject from their own particular vantage point and sometimes neglect contributions from other areas. In this book we attempt to cover all the areas of the social sciences in which research on the relations between personality and social systems is currently proceeding. Our modest hope is that we have been able thereby to broaden the scope of many teachers.

We should like to express our appreciation to Mrs. Pauline Ward, who typed the letters of permission and attended to a thousand other details for us.

NEIL J. SMELSER
WILLIAM T. SMELSER

Berkeley, California
March, 1963

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PART ONE

Introduction: Analyzing Personality and Social Systems

FOR TENS of centuries civilized man has recognized that he is a social animal. Much of the history of theology and philosophy reveals his attempt to fathom the moral and political implications of this fundamental fact. In this effort thinkers have generated hundreds of speculations about the ideal and actual relations between man and society. Only in very recent times—roughly the past two hundred years—have man as an individual and his society become subjects of disciplined scientific investigation. As for the scientific study of the *relations* between the individual and his social surroundings, this endeavor has barely begun.

Personality and Social Systems as Levels of Analysis

Like many infant bodies of knowledge, moreover, the scientific study of these relations has been spotty in its development. Knowledge still rests on two legs—first, imaginative speculations (such as Freud's essays on man and civilization) that command respect because of their ingenuity and comprehensiveness, but do not rest on rigorous research; and second, bits of carefully conducted research that do employ both psychological and social variables, but have unknown or limited theoretical relevance and empirical generalizability. Despite these limitations, studies that link personality and social systems have yielded many promising developments in recent decades. We attempt to record and organize a representative sampling of these developments in this volume. In these introductory remarks we shall specify some of the dimensions for analyzing the relations between personality and social systems.

PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS AS BODIES OF CONSTRUCTS. The study of *personality* focuses on the individual as a system of needs, feelings, aptitudes, skills, defenses, etc.; or on one or more processes, such as the learning of skills, considered in detail. In all cases the organizing conceptual unit is the person. The study of *social systems* focuses on certain relations that emerge when two or more persons interact with one another. Thus

the units of analysis of a social system are not persons as such, but selected aspects of interaction among persons, such as roles (e.g., husband, church-member, citizen) and social organization, which refers to clusters or roles (e.g., a clique, a family, a bureaucracy).

Ultimately, conceptualizations of both personality and social systems are based on inferences from a common body of behavioral data. The investigator of human affairs is confronted with a complex variety of phenomena: verbal and nonverbal communications, expressive movements, physiological states, interactions, etc. To organize these at the *personality* level, he infers or posits that more or less repeated patterns of behavior—e.g., restlessness, searching, eating, quiescence—can be characterized as signifying a "need" for the person. It is convenient to use this term to describe the person's activities, because it organizes many discrete items of behavior under one construct. In addition, the investigator may generate constructs about "attitudes," "defense mechanisms," and so on. To facilitate analysis further, he may posit certain relations among such constructs, and the result is a "personality system." Thereafter, any datum interpreted in terms of this system of constructs is significant at the "personality level."

Similarly, to make sense of behavior at the *social* level, the investigator infers that certain more or less repeated events —performances, interactions, expressions of sentiments, attempts of one person to influence another—can be characterized as signifying a "role." Such a term simplifies the process of describing thousands of discrete events individually. Constructs such as "norm," "sanction," and "clique" also may be developed. Then, when several of these constructs are set into logical relations with one another, the result is a "social system." Thereafter, any datum interpreted in terms of this system of constructs is significant at the "social level."

Any given behavioral datum is inherently neither "psychological" nor "social"; indeed, the same event may be both, depending on the body of constructs within which it is interpreted. An outburst of anger, for instance, may be "psychological" in the sense that it gives rise to recriminations of conscience and subsequent adaptations to these recriminations by the individual. The same outburst may also be "social" in the sense that it strains family relations. The analytic status of a datum, then, is determined by the conceptual system to which it is referred for assessment.

Analytically, these frames of reference—the personality and the social—should be kept distinct. A description of a social system cannot be reduced to the psychological states of the persons in that system; a social system must be described in terms of roles, organizations, norms, etc. Similarly, a description of a personality system cannot be reduced to the social involvements of the person; it must be described in terms of distinctive psychological units. Empirically, however, the two frames of reference articulate in many ways. A social role may integrate many of an individual's drives, skills, attitudes and defenses; an individual's motivational predispositions determine in large part whether a system of roles (e.g., a friendship) will persist or not; a social role (e.g., that of parent) may be internalized to become part of a child's personality. The main objective of this volume is to investigate the many ways in which these two analytically distinct levels affect one another empirically.

We may distinguish between two uses of "personality" and "social system" constructs. The first is as independent variables that bear on the explanation of empirical regularities; the second is as dependent variables, which other sets of variables affect. Let us examine each of these uses.

PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL SYSTEM AS INDEPENDENT VARIABLES. Both personality

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and social system variables have been used in attempts to explain—i.e., to establish necessary and sufficient conditions for some behavioral regularity. Let us suppose, for instance, that the relevant problem is to account for different proportions of income saved by a group of individuals. In using the "personality" level as a source of explanation, we might make recourse to the conscious or unconscious meaning of saving to the individual. Some independent measure of this meaning (such as a defense mechanism of retentiveness) is then related to the differential saving behavior. In using the "social" level, we might refer to individuals' different positions in the society's income distribution to account for the same phenomenon. In both cases we are attempting to establish independent explanatory conditions.

Sometimes personality and social variables are seen as *competing* explanatory constructs. In such cases we can legitimately ask which does the better job. Suppose, for instance, we wish to predict the intellectual attainment of an individual or group of individuals. Can the prediction be made more accurately from a knowledge of the individuals' fantasies, defense systems (e.g., intellectualization) and intellectual capacities or from a knowledge of the parents' intellectual attainments or the intellectual opportunities afforded by relevant social structures?

On other occasions personality and social variables have been *combined* to yield a better explanation than is possible by using one set of variables alone. For instance, the prediction of delinquency is contingent in part on a measure of "ego control of impulse" among a population of individuals, but this measure is insufficient. By including data concerning the individuals' positions in the class structure of the community, it might be possible to account for still more of the variation in delinquent behavior. Part Five of this volume includes a number of research items in which the social and psychological levels are combined to increase explanatory power.

In combining variables at two or more different analytic levels, it is important that these variables be defined independently of one another. If one variable—e.g., the psychological—turns out to be a mere restatement of the other variable, the addition of the psychological variable yields no independent explanatory value.

On still other occasions personality and social variables are viewed as *operating independently* as explanatory principles, since they bear on different aspects of behavior. For example, the incidence of intact marriages might be best predicted by comparing the marital partners' relative social class origins. This predictor, however, might prove to be of little value in accounting for the style or idiom of intact marriages. By adding some psychological measure—e.g., attitudes toward the opposite sex—it might be possible to distinguish intact marriages which are mutually gratifying from those which are not.

Personality and social-system theories can be conceptualized as independent (a) if they do not even concern themselves with common data because neither theory is comprehensive enough to cover all facets of behavior or (b) if they have such loose formal aspects (e.g., clarity and explicitness) that it is not evident whether both theories concern the same empirical data.

Finally, the use of variables at one analytic level frequently involves *implicit assumptions* about the status of variables at the other level. Suppose we predict that as an individual occupies a higher position in the distribution of incomes, the proportion of his savings rises. This is an appeal to a social variable. Suppose the justification for this hypothesis lies in an assertion that at higher income levels his more vital needs (e.g., hunger, food) become satisfied and that he can now lay aside a greater proportion of his

income for the future. Such a justification reveals an unexamined assumption that certain needs (needs for food and warmth stemming from biological exigencies) are more fundamental than other needs (e.g., needs for security). Sometimes such unexamined assumptions turn out to be questionable on psychological grounds. On other occasions two explanatory theories might appear to be independent because of the lack of clarity concerning the implicit assumptions inherent in, or generated by, the theories. On closer inspection, there may be latent hypotheses concerning a common empirical domain. In examining any hypothesis involving variables at one level, then, it is important to locate the number and kinds of assumptions concerning variables at other analytic levels.

In sorting out these different explanatory roles of personality and social variables, we do not mean to obscure one essential feature of social life: Any concrete social situation always involves the operation of variables at both social and psychological levels and complicated feedback relations between the levels. In developing explanatory models, however, it is often necessary to ignore these complications for purposes of analytic simplicity, and introduce them only after establishing relations among a few major variables.

PERSONALITY AND SOCIAL SYSTEM AS DEPENDENT VARIABLES. In addition to serving as explanatory constructs, both personality and social variables can be conceived as themselves requiring explanation. At the *personality* level many questions arise: What is the genesis of motivational structures? How do a person's social involvements affect his attitudes? Under what conditions are skills acquired most rapidly? Why do people hold prejudices? Why do they act on these prejudices on some occasions and not others? In attempting to generate explanations for such problems, investigators appeal to many types of variables—the individual's biological needs and capacities; the situational obstacles he confronts; the cultural traditions that bear on him, etc. *One* major class of variables that influence personality is the system of social interactions in which the individual is implicated. We wish to emphasize these distinctively social determinants of personality in this book; accordingly, Part Three contains research that treats social variables as independent and personality variables as dependent.

At the *social* level an equally complex array of problems arises: Why are role structures (e.g., authority relations) patterned in the ways they are? Under what conditions can conformity to roles be expected? When can deviance be expected? What directions does deviance take, and why does one type of deviance rather than another arise? What are the consequences of different kinds of deviance for the social system? Under what conditions is deviance controlled? As with personality, the variables that influence systems of social interaction are manifold; they include biological limitations, the level of resources in society, the cultural traditions of society, and so on. *One* major set of determinants that influence social systems is the personalities of actors that are implicated in these systems. We wish to emphasize these personality factors in this volume; accordingly, Part Four contains research that treats personality variables as independent and social variables as dependent.

The Personality System

Having noted some of the *uses* of variables at the personality and social levels, let us now consider the *composition* of systems at each level. What are the major classes of variables that constitute personality and social systems, respectively? What are the relations among these variables at each level? Or, to put these ques-

tions slightly differently, what are the major systems of variables that enter propositions at each level? In the pages that follow we shall outline these variables, first at the personality and then at the social level. We shall see that the same conceptual issues arise at each level, and that personality theories bear many formal resemblances to social theories. Having identified the major personality and social variables, we shall then be in a better position to examine how the two kinds of systems interact empirically.

In the following discussion, we are not attempting to formulate our own personality or social theory, but merely to outline several critical classes of variables. Not all these types of variables we mention, moreover, are found in all theories; in addition, some personality theories emphasize certain variables more than others. The following classifications of variables, then, constitute a sampling of the taxonomies currently emphasized in theories at each analytic level.

DIRECTIONAL TENDENCIES OF THE PERSONALITY. What kinds of forces give rise to purposive behavior in human beings? What motivates them? What makes them strive? Or, more specifically, what internal motivational processes give direction, intensity, and persistence to behavior? Such issues preoccupy many personality theorists; accordingly, their theories reveal recurrent attempts to solve them. The usual method of attacking these issues is to posit or infer certain directional tendencies—or needs—that provide the broadest guiding principles for behavior. A corollary assumption made by many theorists is that unless the demands of these directional tendencies are met in a relatively satisfactory manner, disequilibrium of the individual's personality will result.

Examples of these systems of directional tendencies are found in Freud's instincts, Murray's needs, Lewin's valences and vectors, and Miller and Dollard's primary drives. Unfortunately the field of personality psychology does not reveal anything like consensus on the number and kind of these internal tendencies. Freud, for instance, postulates sex and aggression as the two central instincts; in McDougall's theory, on the other hand, important instincts proliferate almost without limit. Again, some theorists find most of the central directional tendencies rooted in the biological requirements of the organism; others give a much more prominant place to social needs.

CAPACITIES OF THE PERSONALITY. Given a set of drives, needs, or instincts, what capacities does the individual possess for arriving at some resolution of tensions resulting from these motivating forces? What are his resources for engaging in successful commerce with his environment?

Personality theorists vary greatly in their treatment of capacities. Those with a more academic (as opposed to clinical) background tend to emphasize cognitive capacities: examples are Cattell's ability traits, Tolman's sign-Gestalts, and Murphy's cognitive and perceptual habits. Other theorists conceive of capacities more broadly. Jung posits four functions or inherent capacities—thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuiting—some of which may be developed at the expense of others. Murray includes intellectual and social abilities (e.g., leadership) in his discussion of those capacities that mediate between needs and the goal-objects of needs.

The capacities of the personality are conceptualized in two ways—as the *potential* of the organism to develop certain skills and abilities and as the *current status* of the individual's performance level. Empirically it is often difficult to distinguish between these two conceptualizations; controversies in the study of intelligence, for instance, revolve around the issue of whether intelligence tests (such as the Terman-Binet or Weschler) tap the

individual's underlying potential or reflect the current state of his intellectual ability.

PERSONALITY STRUCTURE. The individual, according to the concepts just outlined, is motivated by certain directional tendencies and gifted with certain kinds of capacities. The concept of "personality structure" refers to relatively established adaptations that link an individual's needs, his environment, and his capacities. Different elements of personality structure range widely in their relative fixity and flexibility; "deep" structures such as an individual's basic mode of relating to parental figures, for instance, contrast with transient, attitudinal responses to temporary situations.

Freud's trichotomization of the personality into id, ego, and superego is an example of an overall formulation of personality structure. In his version the ego mediates between the demands of the id (directional tendencies) and the incorporated sanctions and prohibitions of society (superego); in so doing it utilizes the individual's capacities to assess reality, devise strategies, and so on. Similarly, Jung characterizes the displacement of psychic energy from one structure to another; in sublimating, for instance, the individual displaces energy from a primitive, undifferentiated state to a more rational, differentiated state.

One type of personality structure frequently studied empirically is a person's attitudes toward himself and others. Such a study marks a very important point of articulation between a personality and a social system. Attitudes, while clearly a part of personality structure, are a function both of "deeper" personality structures (such as infantile love-attachments) and the individual's contemporary involvements in social situations. Too often, unfortunately, investigators focus exclusively on one or the other of these classes of determinants, thus closing off the more fruitful question of the interaction between personality and social variables in the formation of attitudes and opinions.

UNIFYING PRINCIPLES OF PERSONALITY. Many personality theorists have set forth conceptual schemes to emphasize the integration of specific structures into unified, coherent patterns of personality. Adler's concepts of "style of life" and "the creative self" are both unifying principles that give man's life meaning and purpose. Adler stresses the uniqueness of each individual's style and gives great emphasis to man's ability to fashion his own personality. Other theorists are more specific than Adler. Murray, for instance, maintains that many needs operate in the service of definite values, such as physical well-being, knowledge, and esthetic sensitivity. Spranger postulated a number of underlying value orientations (e.g., the theoretical, the political, the economic) that operate as unifying principles for an individual's striving; his scheme has been translated into an empirical measure of an individual's hierarchy of values (the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey profile).

Other theorists resemble Adler in their emphasis on the "self" as a unifying principle; examples are Goldstein's concept of self-realization, Roger's concept of the ideal self, and Jung's concept of self. Jung envisions that the individual's self emerges as a result of religious experience that culminates in an awareness of the oneness of the self and the world. Fromm, finally, stresses broad unifying values such as the self (need for identity), belonging, a sense of uniqueness (creativity and transcendence), as well as theoretical and ideological values. Moreover, he, unlike many other personality theorists, attempts to relate these values to the individual's social context; he argues, for instance, that certain social arrangements, such as capitalism or communism, tend to frustrate individual needs.

Unifying principles may be negative as well as positive. Freud concerned himself

with the punitive aspects of the superego; Sullivan dealt with the anxiety experienced when a person perceives or anticipates censure from others; one of Horney's list of irrational solutions to basic anxiety is the need for perfection and unassailability. Any one of these styles of coping with real or imagined censure from others may become a permanent establishment in the personality system and govern many kinds of behavior and thinking.

We now turn to several classes of variables that represent attempts to classify, describe, and account for processes of change in the personality. The degree to which a given theorist lays stress on change depends in large part on his fundamental assumptions concerning man; the theorist who sees personality in homeostatic balance, for instance, will be less likely to emphasize processes of change than one who sees personality as a creative development of emergent factors. Some theorists (e.g., Eysenck, Sheldon) have not treated change as a major dimension, while others (e.g., Freud, Murphy, Erikson) make change a central issue of personality.

The analysis of change at the personality level can be broken into four subvariables—sources of strain, responses to strain, attempts to control responses to strain, and emergent processes of change. Let us consider each of these briefly.

SOURCES OF STRAIN. Sources of strain arise both from without and from within the personality. Examples of externally-generated strain are the loss of a significant figure, the prospect of death or injury in combat, the presence of an ambiguous environment, or the presence of environmental demands that exceed the individual's capacities. Examples of strain arising within the personality are conflicts between the perceived self and the ideal self (which Rogers has stressed), the overdevelopment of one personality function at the expense of another (which Jung emphasizes), the conflict between the instinctual demands of the id and the moral restraints of the superego (which Freud considers central). Adler's and Horney's emphasis on helplessness and isolation, and Sullivan's concern with disruptive anxiety and the failure of interpersonal communication are further attempts to conceptualize the problem of sources of strain.

RESPONSES TO STRAIN. The immediate response to strain involves subjective feelings of discomfort and unpleasantness (anxiety); frequently these feelings give rise to behavior which proves in many ways to be nonadaptive at the personality level (e.g., regression) and disruptive at the social level. Responses to strain that are especially relevant to social interaction are certain types of "acting out," such as suicide, anti-social behavior, or excessive drinking. Withdrawal from interpersonal involvement as a response to strain may be less immediately threatening publicly, but such a response often disrupts close social relations, such as those in the family.

ATTEMPTS TO CONTROL RESPONSES TO STRAIN. The classic attempt to conceptualize the attempts to deal with responses to strain is found in Freud's theory of the defense mechanisms. These strategies on the part of the ego represent an attempt to remove anxiety from awareness by denying the strain, by projecting the source of strain to external events, or by repressing the disturbing source of strain from memory. Adler sets forth the device of compensation to handle the disruptive effects of helplessness, and Horney describes such defensive strategies as submission or hostility.

Another set of attempts to control reactions to strain involves the reduction or removal of the source of strain itself. *Internally* this means some reorganization of the personality. Freud, for instance, speaks of bringing conflicts into awareness at one stage of sexual development so as to permit advance to the next

stage. Jung postulates a redistribution of psychic energy so that the individual may pursue spiritual and cultural as well as biological needs. *Externally* the individual may attack the source of strain either by changing the environment or by withdrawing from it. An example of the latter is seen in Clark's article, "The 'Cooling-Out' Function in Higher Education," reprinted in this volume; in this case the educational counselor "eases out" the student from a competitive academic situation that would, in the counselor's judgment, be potentially disruptive to the person with limited capacities.

EMERGENT PROCESSES OF CHANGE. Processes of personality change frequently emerge from the delicate balance between responses to strain and attempts to control these responses. Such changes have been attacked generally under three major conceptual rubrics: theories of disorganization and integration, learning theories, and developmental theories.[1] We have discussed some aspects of disorganization in the paragraphs immediately above. Miller and Dollard are the foremost advocates of a learning theory of personality, and concern themselves with socialization as a form of learning. They postulate both the principles of learning (e.g., secondary generalization) as well as the conditions of learning (e.g., the social matrix). Freud, Erikson, Adler, and Sullivan are among those who stress the developmental aspects of change. Freud casts his theory in terms of the differential unfolding of the sexual drive; adult character structures are described in terms of fixation at various developmental stages. Adler deals with early family relations as they influence the individual's sense of power. Erikson and Sullivan both stress adolescent development more than Freud, and posit interpersonal relations as central influences in the development of identity (Erikson) or the self-system (Sullivan).

The major classes of personality variables we have reviewed—directional tendencies, capacities, structure, unifying principles, strain, responses to strain, attempts to control these responses, and processes of change—are present, though often implicitly, in most descriptions and explanations of personality. Most theorists, moreover, argue that these variables stand in systematic relation to one another. For the most part, however, the specifics of these complex interrelations have not been formulated on a scientific basis.

The Social System

Let us now attempt to identify analogous classes of variables at the social system level.

DIRECTIONAL TENDENCIES OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS. A fundamental set of concepts employed in analyzing social systems concerns the general orientations of social life. Or, as the question is often put, what are the exigencies that must be met in order for the social system to continue functioning? Evidently the search for functional tendencies of social systems parallels the search for basic needs at the personality level.

Analysts who attempt to identify the basic directional tendencies of social systems utilize terms such as "functional exigencies," "functional imperatives," "functional prerequisites," and so on.[2] Typical

[1] We do not envision this typology of approaches as either exhaustive or mutually exclusive. A theory of disorganization and integration, for instance, may in some cases be an integral part of a larger theory of development.

[2] Perhaps the best-known discussion of the directional tendencies in society is found in D. F. Aberle, *et al.*, "The Functional Prerequisites of a Society," *Ethics*, Vol. 60 (1950), pp. 110–111; elaborated in Marion J. Levy, Jr., *The Structure of Society* (Princeton, 1952), Ch. III. Somewhat different considerations on the same subject are found in Talcott Parsons, *The Social System* (Glencoe, Ill., 1951), Ch. II.

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