

*Peter L. Berger  
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# The Social Construction of Reality

*A Treatise in the Sociology  
of Knowledge*



Penguin Books

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# Contents

## PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group  
Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England  
Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA  
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia  
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2  
Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Private Bag 102902, NSMC, Auckland, New Zealand  
Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

First published in the USA 1966  
Published in Great Britain by Allen Lane  
The Penguin Press 1967  
Published in Penguin University Books 1971  
Reprinted in Peregrine Books 1979  
Reprinted in Pelican Books 1984  
Reprinted in Penguin Books 1991  
10 9 8 7 6

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Printed in England by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc  
Set in Monotype Plantin

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externalization. Social order is not biologically given or derived from any biological *data* in its empirical manifestations. Social order, needless to add, is also not given in man's natural environment, though particular features of this may be factors in determining certain features of a social order (for example, its economic or technological arrangements). Social order is not part of the 'nature of things', and it cannot be derived from the 'laws of nature'.<sup>14</sup> Social order exists *only* as a product of human activity. No other ontological status may be ascribed to it without hopelessly obfuscating its empirical manifestations. Both in its genesis (social order is the result of past human activity) and its existence in any instant of time (social order exists only and in so far as human activity continues to produce it) it is a human product.

While the social products of human externalization have a character *sui generis* as against both their organismic and their environmental context, it is important to stress that externalization as such is an anthropological necessity.<sup>15</sup> Human being is impossible in a closed sphere of quiescent interiority. Human being must ongoingly externalize itself in activity. This anthropological necessity is grounded in man's biological equipment.<sup>16</sup> The inherent instability of the human organism makes it imperative that man himself provide a stable environment for his conduct. Man himself must specialize and direct his drives. These biological facts serve as a necessary presupposition for the production of social order. In other words, although no existing social order can be derived from biological *data*, the necessity for social order as such stems from man's biological equipment.

To understand the causes, other than those posited by the biological constants, for the emergence, maintenance and transmission of a social order one must undertake an analysis that eventuates in a theory of institutionalization.

### *Origins of Institutionalization*



All human activity is subject to habitualization. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which

can then be reproduced with an economy of effort and which, *ipso facto*, is apprehended by its performer *as* that pattern. Habitualization further implies that the action in question may be performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort. This is true of non-social as well as of social activity. Even the solitary individual on the proverbial desert island habitualizes his activity. When he wakes up in the morning and resumes his attempts to construct a canoe out of matchsticks, he may mumble to himself, 'There I go again', as he starts on step one of an operating procedure consisting of, say, ten steps. In other words, even solitary man has at least the company of his operating procedures.

Habitualized actions, of course, retain their meaningful character for the individual although the meanings involved become embedded as routines in his general stock of knowledge, taken for granted by him and at hand for his projects into the future.<sup>17</sup> Habitualization carries with it the important psychological gain that choices are narrowed. While in theory there may be a hundred ways to go about the project of building a canoe out of matchsticks, habitualization narrows these down to one. This frees the individual from the burden of 'all those decisions', providing a psychological relief that has its basis in man's undirected instinctual structure. Habitualization provides the direction and the specialization of activity that is lacking in man's biological equipment, thus relieving the accumulation of tensions that result from undirected drives.<sup>18</sup> And by providing a stable background in which human activity may proceed with a minimum of decision-making most of the time, it frees energy for such decisions as may be necessary on certain occasions. In other words, the background of habitualized activity opens up a foreground for deliberation and innovation.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of the meanings bestowed by man upon his activity, habitualization makes it unnecessary for each situation to be defined anew, step by step.<sup>20</sup> A large variety of situations may be subsumed under its predefinitions. The activity to be undertaken in these situations can then be anticipated. Even alternatives of conduct can be assigned standard weights.

These processes of habitualization precede any institutionalization, indeed can be made to apply to a hypothetical

solitary individual detached from any social interaction. The fact that even such a solitary individual, assuming that he has been formed as a self (as we would have to assume in the case of our matchstick-canoe builder), will habitualize his activity in accordance with biographical experience of a world of social institutions preceding his solitude need not concern us at the moment. Empirically, the more important part of the habitualization of human activity is coextensive with the latter's institutionalization. The question then becomes how do institutions arise.

Institutionalization occurs whenever there is a reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution.<sup>21</sup> What must be stressed is the reciprocity of institutional typifications and the typicality of not only the actions but also the actors in institutions. The typifications of habitualized actions that constitute institutions are always shared ones. They are *available* to all members of the particular social group in question, and the institution itself typifies individual actors as well as individual actions. The institution posits that actions of type *X* will be performed by actors of type *X*. For example, the institution of the law posits that heads shall be chopped off in specific ways under specific circumstances, and that specific types of individuals shall do the chopping (executioners, say, or members of an impure caste, or virgins under a certain age, or those who have been designated by an oracle).

Institutions further imply historicity and control. Reciprocal typifications of actions are built up in the course of a shared history. They cannot be created instantaneously. Institutions always have a history, of which they are the products. It is impossible to understand an institution adequately without an understanding of the historical process in which it was produced. Institutions also, by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct, which channel it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible. It is important to stress that this controlling character is inherent in institutionalization as such, prior to or apart from any mechanisms of sanctions specifically set up to support an institution. These mechanisms (the sum of which constitute

what is generally called a system of social control) do, of course, exist in many institutions and in all the agglomerations of institutions that we call societies. Their controlling efficacy, however, is of a secondary or supplementary kind. As we shall see again later, the primary social control is given in the existence of an institution as such. To say that a segment of human activity has been institutionalized is already to say that this segment of human activity has been subsumed under social control. Additional control mechanisms are required only in so far as the processes of institutionalization are less than completely successful. Thus, for instance, the law may provide that anyone who breaks the incest taboo will have his head chopped off. This provision may be necessary because there have been cases when individuals offended against the taboo. It is unlikely that this sanction will have to be invoked continuously (unless the institution delineated by the incest taboo is itself in the course of disintegration, a special case that we need not elaborate here). It makes little sense, therefore, to say that human sexuality is socially controlled by beheading certain individuals. Rather, human sexuality is socially controlled by its institutionalization in the course of the particular history in question. One may add, of course, that the incest taboo itself is nothing but the negative side of an assemblage of typifications, which define in the first place which sexual conduct is incestuous and which is not.

In actual experience institutions generally manifest themselves in collectivities containing considerable numbers of people. It is theoretically important, however, to emphasize that the institutionalizing process of reciprocal typification would occur even if two individuals began to interact *de novo*. Institutionalization is incipient in every social situation continuing in time. Let us assume that two persons from entirely different social worlds begin to interact. By saying 'persons' we presuppose that the two individuals have formed selves, something that could, of course, have occurred only in a social process. We are thus for the moment excluding the cases of Adam and Eve, or of two 'feral' children meeting in a clearing of a primeval jungle. But we are assuming that the two individuals arrive at their meeting place from social worlds that have been historically produced in segregation from each other, and

that the interaction therefore takes place in a situation that has not been institutionally defined for either of the participants. It may be possible to imagine a Man Friday joining our matchstick-canoe builder on his desert island, and to imagine the former as a Papuan and the latter as an American. In that case, however, it is likely that the American will have read or at least have heard about the story of Robinson Crusoe, which will introduce a measure of predefinition of the situation at least for him. Let us, then, simply call our two persons *A* and *B*.

As *A* and *B* interact, in whatever manner, typifications will be produced quite quickly. *A* watches *B* perform. He attributes motives to *B*'s actions and, seeing the actions recur, typifies the motives as recurrent. As *B* goes on performing, *A* is soon able to say to himself, 'Aha, there he goes again.' At the same time, *A* may assume that *B* is doing the same thing with regard to him. From the beginning, both *A* and *B* assume this reciprocity of typification. In the course of their interaction these typifications will be expressed in specific patterns of conduct. That is, *A* and *B* will begin to play roles *vis-à-vis* each other. This will occur even if each continues to perform actions different from those of the other. The possibility of taking the role of the other will appear with regard to the same actions performed by both. That is, *A* will inwardly appropriate *B*'s reiterated roles and make them the models for his own role-playing. For example, *B*'s role in the activity of preparing food is not only typified as such by *A*, but enters as a constitutive element into *A*'s own food-preparation role. Thus a collection of reciprocally typified actions will emerge, habitualized for each in roles, some of which will be performed separately and some in common.<sup>22</sup> While this reciprocal typification is not yet institutionalization (since, there only being two individuals, there is no possibility of a typology of actors), it is clear that institutionalization is already present *in nucleo*.

At this stage one may ask what gains accrue to the two individuals from this development. The most important gain is that each will be able to predict the other's actions. Concomitantly, the interaction of both becomes predictable. The 'There he goes again' becomes a 'There *we* go again'. This relieves both individuals of a considerable amount of tension.

They save time and effort, not only in whatever external tasks they might be engaged in separately or jointly, but in terms of their respective psychological economies. Their life together is now defined by a widening sphere of taken-for-granted routines. Many actions are possible on a low level of attention. Each action of one is no longer a source of astonishment and potential danger to the other. Instead, much of what goes on takes on the triviality of what, to both, will be everyday life. This means that the two individuals are constructing a background, in the sense discussed before, which will serve to stabilize both their separate actions and their interaction. The construction of this background of routine in turn makes possible a division of labour between them, opening the way for innovations, which demand a higher level of attention. The division of labour and the innovations will lead to new habitualizations, further widening the background common to both individuals. In other words, a social world will be in process of construction, containing within it the roots of an expanding institutional order.

Generally, all actions repeated once or more tend to be habitualized to some degree, just as all actions observed by another necessarily involve some typification on his part. However, for the kind of reciprocal typification just described to occur there must be a continuing social situation in which the habitualized actions of two or more individuals interlock. Which actions are likely to be reciprocally typified in this manner?

The general answer is, those actions that are relevant to both *A* and *B* within their common situation. The areas likely to be relevant in this way will, of course, vary in different situations. Some will be those facing *A* and *B* in terms of their previous biographies, others may be the result of the natural, pre-social circumstances of the situation. What will in all cases have to be habitualized is the communication process between *A* and *B*. Labour, sexuality and territoriality are other likely foci of typification and habitualization. In these various areas the situation of *A* and *B* is paradigmatic of the institutionalization occurring in larger societies.

Let us push our paradigm one step further and imagine that *A* and *B* have children. At this point the situation changes

qualitatively. The appearance of a third party changes the character of the ongoing social interaction between *A* and *B*, and it will change even further as additional individuals continue to be added.<sup>23</sup> The institutional world, which existed *in statu nascendi* in the original situation of *A* and *B*, is now passed on to others. In this process institutionalization perfects itself. The habitualizations and typifications undertaken in the common life of *A* and *B*, formations that until this point still had the quality of *ad hoc* conceptions of two individuals, now become historical institutions. With the acquisition of historicity, these formations also acquire another crucial quality, or, more accurately, perfect a quality that was incipient as soon as *A* and *B* began the reciprocal typification of their conduct: this quality is objectivity. This means that the institutions that have now been crystallized (for instance, the institution of paternity as it is encountered by the children) are experienced as existing over and beyond the individuals who 'happen to' embody them at the moment. In other words, the institutions are now experienced as possessing a reality of their own, a reality that confronts the individual as an external and coercive fact.<sup>24</sup>

As long as the nascent institutions are constructed and maintained only in the interaction of *A* and *B*, their objectivity remains tenuous, easily changeable, almost playful, even while they attain a measure of objectivity by the mere fact of their formation. To put this a little differently, the routinized background of *A*'s and *B*'s activity remains fairly accessible to deliberate intervention by *A* and *B*. Although the routines, once established, carry within them a tendency to persist, the possibility of changing them or even abolishing them remains at hand in consciousness. *A* and *B* alone are responsible for having constructed this world. *A* and *B* remain capable of changing or abolishing it. What is more, since they themselves have shaped this world in the course of a shared biography which they can remember, the world thus shaped appears fully transparent to them. They understand the world that they themselves have made. All this changes in the process of transmission to the new generation. The objectivity of the institutional world 'thickens' and 'hardens', not only for the children, but (by a mirror effect) for the parents as well. The

'There we go again' now becomes 'This is how these things are done'. A world so regarded attains a firmness in consciousness; it becomes real in an ever more massive way and it can no longer be changed so readily. For the children, especially in the early phase of their socialization into it, it becomes *the* world. For the parents, it loses its playful quality and becomes 'serious'. For the children, the parentally transmitted world is not fully transparent. Since they had no part in shaping it, it confronts them as a given reality that, like nature, is opaque in places at least.

Only at this point does it become possible to speak of a social world at all, in the sense of a comprehensive and given reality confronting the individual in a manner analogous to the reality of the natural world. Only in this way, as an objective world, can the social formations be transmitted to a new generation. In the early phases of socialization the child is quite incapable of distinguishing between the objectivity of natural phenomena and the objectivity of the social formations.<sup>25</sup> To take the most important item of socialization, language appears to the child as inherent in the nature of things, and he cannot grasp the notion of its conventionality. A thing *is* what it is called, and it could not be called anything else. All institutions appear in the same way, as given, unalterable and self-evident. Even in our empirically unlikely example of parents having constructed an institutional world *de novo*, the objectivity of this world would be increased for them by the socialization of their children, because the objectivity experienced by the children would reflect back upon their own experience of this world. Empirically, of course, the institutional world transmitted by most parents already has the character of historical and objective reality. The process of transmission simply strengthens the parents' sense of reality, if only because, to put it crudely, if one says, 'This is how these things are done', often enough one believes it oneself.<sup>26</sup>

An institutional world, then, is experienced as an objective reality. It has a history that antedates the individual's birth and is not accessible to his biographical recollection. It was there before he was born, and it will be there after his death. This history itself, as the tradition of the existing institutions, has the character of objectivity. The individual's biography is

apprehended as an episode located within the objective history of the society. The institutions, as historical and objective facticities, confront the individual as undeniable facts. The institutions are *there*, external to him, persistent in their reality, whether he likes it or not. He cannot wish them away. They resist his attempts to change or evade them. They have coercive power over him, both in themselves, by the sheer force of their facticity, and through the control mechanisms that are usually attached to the most important of them. The objective reality of institutions is not diminished if the individual does not understand their purpose or their mode of operation. He may experience large sectors of the social world as incomprehensible, perhaps oppressive in their opaqueness, but real none the less. Since institutions exist as external reality, the individual cannot understand them by introspection. He must 'go out' and learn about them, just as he must to learn about nature. This remains true even though the social world, as a humanly produced reality, is potentially understandable in a way not possible in the case of the natural world.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity. The process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity is objectivation.<sup>28</sup> The institutional world is objectivated human activity, and so is every single institution. In other words, despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it. The paradox that man is capable of producing a world that he then experiences as something other than a human product will concern us later on. At the moment, it is important to emphasize that the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one. That is, man (not, of course, in isolation but in his collectivities) and his social world interact with each other. The product acts back upon the producer. Externalization and objectivation are moments in a continuing dialectical process. The third moment in this process, which is internalization (by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness in the course of

socialization), will occupy us in considerable detail later on. It is already possible, however, to see the fundamental relationship of these three dialectical moments in social reality. Each of them corresponds to an essential characterization of the social world. *Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product.* It may also already be evident that an analysis of the social world that leaves out any one of these three moments will be distortive.<sup>29</sup> One may further add that only with the transmission of the social world to a new generation (that is, internalization as effectuated in socialization) does the fundamental social dialectic appear in its totality. To repeat, only with the appearance of a new generation can one properly speak of a social world.

At the same point, the institutional world requires legitimation, that is, ways by which it can be 'explained' and justified. This is not because it appears less real. As we have seen, the reality of the social world gains in massivity in the course of its transmission. This reality, however, is a historical one, which comes to the new generation as a tradition rather than as a biographical memory. In our paradigmatic example, *A* and *B*, the original creators of the social world, can always reconstruct the circumstances under which their world and any part of it was established. That is, they can arrive at the meaning of an institution by exercising their powers of recollection. *A*'s and *B*'s children are in an altogether different situation. Their knowledge of the institutional history is by way of 'hearsay'. The original meaning of the institutions is inaccessible to them in terms of memory. It, therefore, becomes necessary to interpret this meaning to them in various legitimating formulas. These will have to be consistent and comprehensive in terms of the institutional order, if they are to carry conviction to the new generation. The same story, so to speak, must be told to all the children. It follows that the expanding institutional order develops a corresponding canopy of legitimations, stretching over it a protective cover of both cognitive and normative interpretation. These legitimations are learned by the new generation during the same process that socializes them into the institutional order. This, again, will occupy us in greater detail further on.

The development of specific mechanisms of social controls

also becomes necessary with the historicization and objectivation of institutions. Deviance from the institutionally 'programmed' courses of action becomes likely once the institutions have become realities divorced from their original relevance in the concrete social processes from which they arose. To put this more simply, it is more likely that one will deviate from programmes set up for one by others than from programmes that one has helped establish oneself. The new generation posits a problem of compliance, and its socialization into the institutional order requires the establishment of sanctions. The institutions must and do claim authority over the individual, independently of the subjective meanings he may attach to any particular situation. The priority of the institutional definitions of situations must be consistently maintained over individual temptations at redefinition. The children must be 'taught to behave' and, once taught, must be 'kept in line'. So, of course, must the adults. The more conduct is institutionalized, the more predictable and thus the more controlled it becomes. If socialization into the institutions has been effective, outright coercive measures can be applied economically and selectively. Most of the time, conduct will occur 'spontaneously' within the institutionally set channels. The more, on the level of meaning, conduct is taken for granted, the more possible alternatives to the institutional 'programmes' will recede, and the more predictable and controlled conduct will be.

In principle, institutionalization may take place in any area of collectively relevant conduct. In actual fact, sets of institutionalization processes take place concurrently. There is no *a priori* reason for assuming that these processes will necessarily 'hang together' functionally, let alone as a logically consistent system. To return once more to our paradigmatic example, slightly changing the fictitious situation, let us assume this time, not a budding family of parents and children, but a piquant triangle of a male *A*, a bisexual female *B*, and a Lesbian *C*. We need not belabour the point that the sexual relevances of these three individuals will not coincide. Relevance *A-B* is not shared by *C*. The habituations engendered as a result of relevance *A-B* need bear no relationship to those engendered by relevances *B-C* and *C-A*. There is, after all, no

reason why two processes of erotic habituation, one heterosexual and one Lesbian, cannot take place side by side without functionally integrating with each other or with a third habituation based on a shared interest in, say, the growing of flowers (or whatever other enterprise might be jointly relevant to an active heterosexual male and an active Lesbian). In other words, three processes of habituation or incipient institutionalization may occur without their being functionally or logically integrated as social phenomena. The same reasoning holds if *A*, *B* and *C* are posited as collectivities rather than individuals, regardless of what content their relevances might have. Also, functional or logical integration cannot be assumed *a priori* when habituation or institutionalization processes are limited to the same individuals or collectivities, rather than to the discrete ones assumed in our example.

Nevertheless, the empirical fact remains that institutions do tend to 'hang together'. If this phenomenon is not to be taken for granted, it must be explained. How can this be done? First, one may argue that *some* relevances will be common to all members of a collectivity. On the other hand, many areas of conduct will be relevant only to certain types. The latter involves an incipient differentiation, at least in the way in which these types are assigned some relatively stable meaning. This assignment may be based on pre-social differences, such as sex, or on differences brought about in the course of social interaction, such as those engendered by the division of labour. For example, only women may be concerned with fertility magic and only hunters may engage in cave painting. Or, only the old men may perform the rain ceremonial and only weapon-makers may sleep with their maternal cousins. In terms of their external social functionality, these several areas of conduct need not be integrated into *one* cohesive system. They can continue to coexist on the basis of segregated performances. But while performances can be segregated, meanings tend towards at least minimal consistency. As the individual reflects about the successive moments of his experience, he tries to fit their meanings into a consistent biographical framework. This tendency increases as the individual shares with others his meanings and their biographical integration. It is possible that this tendency to integrate

meanings is based on a psychological need, which may in turn be physiologically grounded (that is, that there may be a built-in 'need' for cohesion in the psycho-physiological constitution of man). Our argument, however, does not rest on such anthropological assumptions, but rather on the analysis of meaningful reciprocity in processes of institutionalization.

It follows that great care is required in any statements one makes about the 'logic' of institutions. The logic does not reside in the institutions and their external functionalities, but in the way these are treated in reflection about them. Put differently, reflective consciousness superimposes the quality of logic on the institutional order.<sup>30</sup>

Language provides the fundamental superimposition of logic on the objectivated social world. The edifice of legitimations is built upon language and uses language as its principal instrumentality. The 'logic' thus attributed to the institutional order is part of the socially available stock of knowledge and taken for granted as such. Since the well-socialized individual 'knows' that his social world is a consistent whole, he will be constrained to explain both its functioning and malfunctioning in terms of this 'knowledge'. It is very easy, as a result, for the observer of any society to assume that its institutions do indeed function and integrate as they are 'supposed to'.<sup>31</sup>

*De facto*, then, institutions are integrated. But their integration is not a functional imperative for the social processes that produce them; it is rather brought about in a derivative fashion. Individuals perform discrete institutionalized actions within the context of their biography. This biography is a reflected-upon whole in which the discrete actions are thought of, not as isolated events, but as related parts in a subjectively meaningful universe whose meanings are not specific to the individual, but socially articulated and shared. Only by way of this detour of socially shared universes of meaning do we arrive at the need for institutional integration.

This has far-reaching implications for any analysis of social phenomena. If the integration of an institutional order can be understood only in terms of the 'knowledge' that its members have of it, it follows that the analysis of such 'knowledge' will be essential for an analysis of the institutional order in ques-

tion. It is important to stress that this does not exclusively or even primarily involve a preoccupation with complex theoretical systems serving as legitimations for the institutional order. Theories also have to be taken into account, of course. But theoretical knowledge is only a small and by no means the most important part of what passes for knowledge in a society. Theoretically sophisticated legitimations appear at particular moments of an institutional history. The primary knowledge about the institutional order is knowledge on the pre-theoretical level. It is the sum total of 'what everybody knows' about a social world, an assemblage of maxims, morals, proverbial nuggets of wisdom, values and beliefs, myths, and so forth, the theoretical integration of which requires considerable intellectual fortitude in itself, as the long line of heroic integrators from Homer to the latest sociological system-builders testifies. On the pre-theoretical level, however, every institution has a body of transmitted recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge that supplies the institutionally appropriate rules of conduct.<sup>32</sup>

Such knowledge constitutes the motivating dynamics of institutionalized conduct. It defines the institutionalized areas of conduct and designates all situations falling within them. It defines and constructs the roles to be played in the context of the institutions in question. *Ipsa facto*, it controls and predicts all such conduct. Since this knowledge is socially objectivated as knowledge, that is, as a body of generally valid truths about reality, any radical deviance from the institutional order appears as a departure from reality. Such deviance may be designated as moral depravity, mental disease, or just plain ignorance. While these fine distinctions will have obvious consequences for the treatment of the deviant, they all share an inferior cognitive status within the particular social world. In this way, the particular social world becomes the world *tout court*. What is taken for granted as knowledge in the society comes to be coextensive with the knowable, or at any rate provides the framework within which anything not yet known will come to be known in the future. This is the knowledge that is learned in the course of socialization and that mediates the internalization within individual consciousness of the objectivated structures of the social world. Knowledge, in

this sense, is at the heart of the fundamental dialectic of society. It 'programmes' the channels in which externalization produces an objective world. It objectifies this world through language and the cognitive apparatus based on language, that is, it orders it into objects to be apprehended as reality.<sup>33</sup> It is internalized again *as* objectively valid truth in the course of socialization. Knowledge about society is thus a *realization* in the double sense of the word, in the sense of apprehending the objectivated social reality, and in the sense of ongoingly producing this reality.

For example, in the course of the division of labour a body of knowledge is developed that refers to the particular activities involved. In its linguistic basis, this knowledge is already indispensable to the institutional 'programming' of these economic activities. There will be, say, a vocabulary designating the various modes of hunting, the weapons to be employed, the animals that serve as prey, and so on. There will further be a collection of recipes that must be learned if one is to hunt correctly. This knowledge serves as a channelling, controlling force in itself, an indispensable ingredient of the institutionalization of this area of conduct. As the institution of hunting is crystallized and persists in time, the same body of knowledge serves as an objective (and, incidentally, empirically verifiable) description of it. A whole segment of the social world is objectified by this knowledge. There will be an objective 'science' of hunting, corresponding to the objective reality of the hunting economy. The point need not be belaboured that here 'empirical verification' and 'science' are not understood in the sense of modern scientific canons, but rather in the sense of knowledge that may be borne out in experience and that can subsequently become systematically organized as a body of knowledge.

Again, the same body of knowledge is transmitted to the next generation. It is learned as objective truth in the course of socialization and thus internalized as subjective reality. This reality in turn has power to shape the individual. It will produce a specific type of person, namely the hunter, whose identity and biography *as* a hunter have meaning only in a universe constituted by the aforementioned body of knowledge as a whole (say, in a hunters' society) or in part (say, in our

own society, in which hunters come together in a sub-universe of their own). In other words, no part of the institutionalization of hunting can exist without the particular knowledge that has been socially produced and objectivated with reference to this activity. To hunt and to be a hunter imply existence in a social world defined and controlled by this body of knowledge. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same applies to any area of institutionalized conduct.

### *Sedimentation and Tradition*



Only a small part of the totality of human experiences is retained in consciousness. The experiences that are so retained become sedimented, that is, they congeal in recollection as recognizable and memorable entities.<sup>34</sup> Unless such sedimentation took place the individual could not make sense of his biography. Intersubjective sedimentation also takes place when several individuals share a common biography, experiences of which become incorporated in a common stock of knowledge. Intersubjective sedimentation can be called truly social only when it has been objectivated in a sign system of one kind or another, that is, when the possibility of reiterated objectification of the shared experiences arises. Only then is it likely that these experiences will be transmitted from one generation to the next, and from one collectivity to another. Theoretically, common activity, without a sign system, could be the basis for transmission. Empirically, this is improbable. An objectively available sign system bestows a status of incipient anonymity on the sedimented experiences by detaching them from their original context of concrete individual biographies and making them generally available to all who share, or may share in the future, in the sign system in question. The experiences thus become readily transmittable.

In principle, any sign system would do. Normally, of course, the decisive sign system is linguistic. Language objectivates the shared experiences and makes them available to all within the linguistic community, thus becoming both the basis and

the instrument of the collective stock of knowledge. Furthermore, language provides the means for objectifying new experiences, allowing their incorporation into the already existing stock of knowledge, and it is the most important means by which the objectivated and objectified sedimentations are transmitted in the tradition of the collectivity in question.

For example, only some members of a hunting society have the experience of losing their weapons and being forced to fight a wild animal with their bare hands. This frightening experience, with whatever lessons in bravery, cunning and skill it yields, is firmly sedimented in the consciousness of the individuals who went through it. If the experience is shared by several individuals, it will be sedimented intersubjectively, may perhaps even form a profound bond between these individuals. As this experience is designated and transmitted linguistically, however, it becomes accessible and, perhaps, strongly relevant to individuals who have never gone through it. The linguistic designation (which, in a hunting society, we may imagine to be very precise and elaborate indeed – say, ‘lone big kill, with one hand, of male rhinoceros’, ‘lone big kill, with two hands, of female rhinoceros’, and so forth) abstracts the experience from its individual biographical occurrences. It becomes an objective possibility for everyone, or at any rate for everyone within a certain type (say, fully initiated hunters); that is, it becomes anonymous in principle even if it is still associated with the feats of specific individuals. Even to those who do not anticipate the experience in their own future biography (say, women forbidden to hunt), it may be relevant in a derived manner (say, in terms of the desirability of a future husband); in any case it is part of the common stock of knowledge. The objectification of the experience in the language (that is, its transformation into a generally available object of knowledge) then allows its incorporation into a larger body of tradition by way of moral instruction, inspirational poetry, religious allegory and whatnot. Both the experience in the narrower sense and its appendage of wider significations can then be taught to every new generation, or even diffused to an altogether different collectivity (say, an agricultural society that may attach quite different meanings to the whole business).

Language becomes the depository of a large aggregate of collective sedimentations, which can be acquired monothetically, that is, as cohesive wholes and without reconstructing their original process of formation.<sup>35</sup> Since the actual origin of the sedimentations has become unimportant, the tradition might invent quite a different origin without thereby threatening what has been objectivated. In other words, legitimations can succeed each other, from time to time bestowing new meanings on the sedimented experiences of the collectivity in question. The past history of the society can be reinterpreted without necessarily upsetting the institutional order as a result. For instance, in the above example, the ‘big kill’ may come to be legitimated as a deed of divine figures and any human repetition of it as an imitation of the mythological prototype.

This process underlines all objectivated sedimentations, not only institutionalized actions. It may refer, for instance, to the transmission of typifications of others not directly relevant to specific institutions. For example, others are typified as ‘tall’ or ‘short’, ‘fat’ or ‘thin’, ‘bright’ or ‘dull’, without any particular institutional implications being attached to these typifications. The process, of course, also applies to the transmission of sedimented meanings that meet the previously given specification of institutions. The transmission of the meaning of an institution is based on the social recognition of that institution as a ‘permanent’ solution to a ‘permanent’ problem of the given collectivity. Therefore, potential actors of institutionalized actions must be *systematically* acquainted with these meanings. This necessitates some form of ‘educational’ process. The institutional meanings must be impressed powerfully and unforgettably upon the consciousness of the individual. Since human beings are frequently sluggish and forgetful, there must also be procedures by which these meanings can be reimpresed and rememorized, if necessary by coercive and generally unpleasant means. Furthermore, since human beings are frequently stupid, institutional meanings tend to become simplified in the process of transmission, so that the given collection of institutional ‘formulae’ can be readily learned and memorized by successive generations. The ‘formula’ character of institutional meanings ensures their

memorability. We have here on the level of sedimented meanings the same processes of routinization and trivialization that we have already noted in the discussion of institutionalization. Again, the stylized form in which heroic feats enter a tradition is a useful illustration.

The objectivated meanings of institutional activity are conceived of as 'knowledge' and transmitted as such. Some of this 'knowledge' is deemed relevant to all, some only to certain types. All transmission requires some sort of social apparatus. That is, some types are designated as transmitters, other types as recipients of the traditional 'knowledge'. The specific character of this apparatus will, of course, vary from society to society. There will also be typified procedures for the passage of the tradition from the knowers to the non-knowers. For example, the technical, magical and moral lore of hunting may be transmitted by maternal uncles to nephews of a certain age, by means of specified procedures of initiation. The typology of knowers and non-knowers, like the 'knowledge' that is supposed to pass between them, is a matter of social definition; both 'knowing' and 'not knowing' refer to what is socially defined as reality, and not to some extra-social criteria of cognitive validity. To put this crudely, maternal uncles do not transmit this particular stock of knowledge because they know it, but they know it (that is, are defined as knowers) *because* they are maternal uncles. If an institutionally designated maternal uncle, for particular reasons, turns out to be incapable of transmitting the knowledge in question, he is no longer a maternal uncle in the full sense of the word, and, indeed, institutional recognition of this status may be withdrawn from him.

Depending on the social span of relevance of a certain type of 'knowledge' and its complexity and importance in a particular collectivity, the 'knowledge' may have to be reaffirmed through symbolic objects (such as fetishes and military emblems), and/or symbolic actions (such as religious or military ritual). In other words, physical objects and actions may be called upon as mnemotechnic aids. All transmission of institutional meanings obviously implies control and legitimation procedures. These are attached to the institutions themselves and administered by the transmitting personnel. It may be

stressed again here that no *a priori* consistency, let alone functionality, may be presumed as existing between different institutions and the forms of the transmission of knowledge pertaining to them. The problem of logical coherence arises first on the level of legitimation (where there may be conflict or competition between different legitimations and their administrative personnel), and secondly on the level of socialization (where there may be practical difficulties in the internalization of successive or competing institutional meanings). To return to a previous example, there is no *a priori* reason why institutional meanings that originated in a hunting society should not be diffused to an agricultural society. What is more, these meanings may, to an outside observer, appear to have dubious 'functionality' in the first society at the time of diffusion and no 'functionality' at all in the second. The difficulties that may arise here are connected with the theoretical activities of the legitimators and the practical ones of the 'educators' in the new society. The theoreticians have to satisfy themselves that a hunting goddess is a plausible denizen in an agrarian pantheon and the pedagogues have a problem explaining her mythological activities to children who have never seen a hunt. Legitimizing theoreticians tend to have logical aspirations and children tend to be recalcitrant. This, however, is not a problem of abstract logic or technical functionality, but rather of ingenuity on the one hand and credulity on the other – a rather different proposition.

#### Roles



As we have seen, the origins of any institutional order lie in the typification of one's own and others' performances. This implies that one shares with others specific goals and interlocking phases of performance, and, further, that not only specific actions but forms of action are typified. That is, there will be the recognition not only of a particular actor performing an action of type *X*, but of type-*X* action as being performable by *any* actor to whom the relevance structure in question can be

plausibly imputed. For example, one may recognize one's brother-in-law engaged in thrashing one's insolent offspring and understand that this particular action is only one instance of a form of action appropriate to other pairs of uncles and nephews, indeed, is a generally available pattern in a matrilineal society. Only if the latter typification prevails will this incident follow a socially taken-for-granted course, with the father discreetly withdrawing from the scene so as not to disturb the legitimate exercise of avuncular authority.

The typification of forms of action requires that these have an objective sense, which in turn requires a linguistic objectification. That is, there will be a vocabulary referring to these forms of action (such as 'nephew-thrashing', which will belong to a much larger linguistic structuring of kinship and its various rights and obligations). In principle, then, an action and its sense can be apprehended apart from individual performances of it and the variable subjective processes associated with them. Both self and other can be apprehended as performers of objective, generally known actions, which are recurrent and repeatable by *any* actor of the appropriate type.

This has very important consequences for self-experience. In the course of action there is an identification of the self with the objective sense of the action; the action that is going on determines, for that moment, the self-apprehension of the actor, and does so in the objective sense that has been socially ascribed to the action. Although there continues to be a marginal awareness of the body and other aspects of the self not directly involved in the action, the actor, for that moment, apprehends himself essentially in identification with the socially objectivated action ('I am now thrashing my nephew'—a taken-for-granted episode in the routine of everyday life). After the action has taken place there is a further important consequence, as the actor reflects about his action. Now a *part* of the self is objectified *as* the performer of this action, with the whole self again becoming relatively disidentified from the performed action. That is, it becomes possible to conceive of the self as having been only partially involved in the action (after all, the man in our example is other things besides being a nephew-thrasher). It is not difficult to see that, as these objectifications accumulate ('nephew-thrasher', 'sister-

supporter', 'initiate-warrior', 'rain-dance virtuoso', and so forth), an entire sector of self-consciousness is structured in terms of these objectifications. In other words, a segment of the self is objectified in terms of the socially available typifications. This segment is the truly 'social self', which is subjectively experienced as distinct from and even confronting the self in its totality.<sup>36</sup> This important phenomenon, which allows an internal 'conversation' between the different segments of the self, will be taken up again later when we look at the process by which the socially constructed world is internalized in individual consciousness. For the moment, what is important is the relationship of the phenomenon to the objectively available typifications of conduct.

In sum, the actor identifies with the socially objectivated typifications of conduct *in actu*, but re-establishes distance from them as he reflects about his conduct afterwards. This distance between the actor and his action can be retained in consciousness and projected to future repetitions of the actions. In this way both acting self and acting others are apprehended not as unique individuals, but as *types*. By definition, these types are interchangeable.

We can properly begin to speak of roles when this kind of typification occurs in the context of an objectified stock of knowledge common to a collectivity of actors. Roles are types of actors in such a context.<sup>37</sup> It can readily be seen that the construction of role typologies is a necessary correlate of the institutionalization of conduct. Institutions are embodied in individual experience by means of roles. The roles, objectified linguistically, are an essential ingredient of the objectively available world of any society. By playing roles, the individual participates in a social world. By internalizing these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to him.

In the common stock of knowledge there are standards of role performance that are accessible to all members of a society, or at least to those who are potential performers of the roles in question. This general accessibility is itself part of the same stock of knowledge; not only are the standards of role *X* generally known, but it is known *that* these standards are known. Consequently every putative actor of role *X* can be held responsible for abiding by the standards, which can be

taught as part of the institutional tradition and used to verify the credentials of all performers and, by the same token, serve as controls.

The origins of roles lie in the same fundamental process of habitualization and objectivation as the origins of institutions. Roles appear as soon as a common stock of knowledge containing reciprocal typifications of conduct is in process of formation, a process that, as we have seen, is endemic to social interaction and prior to institutionalization proper. The question as to which roles become institutionalized is identical with the question as to which areas of conduct are affected by institutionalization, and may be answered the same way. *All* institutionalized conduct involves roles. Thus roles share in the controlling character of institutionalization. As soon as actors are typified as role performers, their conduct is *ipso facto* susceptible to enforcement. Compliance and non-compliance with socially defined role standards cease to be optional, though, of course, the severity of sanctions may vary from case to case.

The roles *represent* the institutional order.<sup>38</sup> This representation takes place on two levels. First, performance of the role represents itself. For instance, to engage in judging is to represent the role of judge. The judging individual is not acting 'on his own', but *qua* judge. Second, the role represents an entire institutional nexus of conduct. The role of judge stands in relationship to other roles, the totality of which comprises the institution of law. The judge acts as the representative of this institution. Only through such representation in performed roles can the institution manifest itself in actual experience. The institution, with its assemblage of 'programmed' actions, is like the unwritten libretto of a drama. The realization of the drama depends upon the reiterated performances of its prescribed roles by living actors. The actors embody the roles and actualize the drama by representing it on the given stage. Neither drama nor institution exist empirically apart from this recurrent realization. To say, then, that roles represent institutions is to say that roles make it possible for institutions to exist, ever again, as a real presence in the experience of living individuals.

Institutions are also represented in other ways. Their lin-

guistic objectifications, from their simple verbal designations to their incorporation in highly complex symbolizations of reality, also represent them (that is, make them present) in experience. And they may be symbolically represented by physical objects, both natural and artificial. All these representations, however, become 'dead' (that is, bereft of subjective reality) unless they are ongoingly 'brought to life' in actual human conduct. The representation of an institution in and by roles is thus the representation *par excellence*, on which all other representations are dependent. For example, the institution of law is, of course, also represented by legal language, codes of law, theories of jurisprudence and, finally, by the ultimate legitimations of the institution and its norms in ethical, religious or mythological systems of thought. Such man-made phenomena as the awesome paraphernalia that frequently accompany the administration of law, and such natural ones as the clap of thunder that may be taken as the divine verdict in a trial by ordeal and may eventually even become a symbol of ultimate justice, further represent the institution. All these representations, however, derive their continuing significance and even intelligibility from their utilization in human conduct, which here, of course, is conduct typified in the institutional roles of the law.

When individuals begin to reflect upon these matters they face the problem of binding the various representations together in a cohesive whole that will make sense.<sup>39</sup> Any concrete role performance refers to the objective sense of the institution, and thus to the other complementary role performances, and to the sense of the institution as a whole. While the problem of integrating the various representations so involved is solved primarily on the level of legitimation, it is also dealt with in terms of certain roles. *All* roles represent the institutional order in the aforementioned sense. *Some* roles, however, symbolically represent that order in its totality more than others. Such roles are of great strategic importance in a society, since they represent not only this or that institution, but the integration of all institutions in a meaningful world. *Ipsa facto*, of course, these roles help in maintaining such integration in the consciousness and conduct of the members of the society, that is, they have a special relationship to the legitimating

apparatus of the society. Some roles have no functions *other than* this symbolic representation of the institutional order as an integrated totality, others take on this function from time to time in addition to the less exalted functions they routinely perform. The judge, for instance, may, on occasion, in some particularly important case, represent the total integration of society in this way. The monarch does so all the time and, indeed, in a constitutional monarchy, may have no other function than as a 'living symbol' for all levels of the society, down to the man in the street. Historically, roles that symbolically represent the total institutional order have been most commonly located in political and religious institutions.<sup>40</sup>

More important for our immediate considerations is the character of roles as mediators of specific sectors of the common stock of knowledge. By virtue of the roles he plays the individual is inducted into specific areas of socially objectivated knowledge, not only in the narrower cognitive sense, but also in the sense of the 'knowledge' of norms, values and even emotions. To be a judge obviously involves a knowledge of the law and probably also knowledge of a much wider range of human affairs that are legally relevant. It also involves, however, 'knowledge' of the values and attitudes deemed appropriate for a judge, extending as far as those proverbially deemed appropriate for a judge's wife. The judge must also have appropriate 'knowledge' in the domain of the emotions: he will have to know, for example, when to restrain his feelings of compassion, to mention a not unimportant psychological prerequisite for this role. In this way, each role opens an entrance into a specific sector of the society's total stock of knowledge. To learn a role it is not enough to acquire the routines immediately necessary for its 'outward' performance. One must also be initiated into the various cognitive and even affective layers of the body of knowledge that is directly *and* indirectly appropriate to this role.

This implies a social distribution of knowledge.<sup>41</sup> A society's stock of knowledge is structured in terms of what is generally relevant and what is relevant only to specific roles. This is true of even very simple social situations, such as our previous example of a social situation produced by the ongoing interaction of a man, a bisexual woman and a Lesbian. Here some

knowledge is relevant to all three individuals (for instance, knowledge of the procedures necessary to keep this company economically afloat), while other knowledge is relevant only to two of the individuals (the *savoir-faire* of Lesbian or, in the other case, of heterosexual seduction). In other words, the social distribution of knowledge entails a dichotomization in terms of general and role-specific relevance.

Given the historical accumulation of knowledge in a society, we can assume that, because of the division of labour, role-specific knowledge will grow at a faster rate than generally relevant and accessible knowledge. The multiplication of specific tasks brought about by the division of labour requires standardized solutions that can be readily learned and transmitted. These in turn require specialized knowledge of certain situations, and of the means/ends relationships in terms of which the situations are socially defined. In other words, specialists will arise, each of whom will have to know whatever is deemed necessary for the fulfilment of his particular task.

To accumulate role-specific knowledge a society must be so organized that certain individuals can concentrate on their specialities. If in a hunting society certain individuals are to become specialists as swordsmiths, there will have to be provisions to excuse them from the hunting activities that are incumbent on all other adult males. Specialized knowledge of a more elusive kind, such as the knowledge of mystagogues and other intellectuals, requires similar social organization. In all these cases the specialists become administrators of the sectors of the stock of knowledge that have been socially assigned to them.

At the same time, an important part of generally relevant knowledge is the typology of specialists. While the specialists are defined as individuals who know their specialities, everyone must know who the specialists are in case their specialities are needed. The man in the street is not expected to know the intricacies of the magic of inducing fertility or casting evil spells. What he *must* know, however, is which magicians to call upon if the need for either of these services arises. A typology of experts (what contemporary social workers call a referral guide) is thus part of the generally relevant and accessible stock of knowledge, while the knowledge that constitutes

expertise is not. The practical difficulties that may arise in certain societies (for instance, when there are competing coteries of experts, or when specialization has become so complicated that the layman gets confused) need not concern us at the moment.

It is thus possible to analyse the relationship between roles and knowledge from two vantage points. Looked at from the perspective of the institutional order, the roles appear as institutional representations and mediations of the institutionally objectivated aggregates of knowledge. Looked at from the perspective of the several roles, each role carries with it a socially defined appendage of knowledge. Both perspectives, of course, point to the same global phenomenon, which is the essential dialectic of society. The first perspective can be summed up in the proposition that society exists only as individuals are conscious of it, the second in the proposition that individual consciousness is socially determined. Narrowing this to the matter of roles, we can say that, on the one hand, the institutional order is real only in so far as it is *realized* in performed roles and that, on the other hand, roles are representative of an institutional order that defines their character (including their appendages of knowledge) and from which they derive their objective sense.

The analysis of roles is of particular importance to the sociology of knowledge because it reveals the mediations between the macroscopic universes of meaning objectivated in a society and the ways by which these universes are subjectively real to individuals. Thus it is possible, for example, to analyse the macroscopic social roots of a religious world view in certain collectivities (classes, say, or ethnic groups, or intellectual coteries), and also to analyse the manner in which this world view is manifested in the consciousness of an individual. The two analyses can be brought together only if one inquires into the ways in which the individual, in his total social activity, relates to the collectivity in question. Such an inquiry will, of necessity, be an exercise in role analysis.<sup>42</sup>

### *Scope and Modes of Institutionalization*



So far we have discussed institutionalization in terms of essential features that may be taken as sociological constants. Obviously we cannot in this treatise give even an overview of the countless variations in the historical manifestations and combinations of these constants – a task that could be achieved only by writing a universal history from the point of view of sociological theory. There are, however, a number of historical variations in the character of institutions that are so important for concrete sociological analyses that they should be at least briefly discussed. Our focus will, of course, continue to be on the relationship between institutions and knowledge.

In investigating any concrete institutional order, one may ask the following question: What is the scope of institutionalization within the totality of social actions in a given collectivity? In other words, how large is the sector of institutionalized activity as compared with the sector that is left uninstitutionalized?<sup>43</sup> Clearly there is historical variability in this matter, with different societies allowing more or less room for uninstitutionalized actions. An important general consideration is what factors determine a wider as against a narrower scope of institutionalization.

Very formally, the scope of institutionalization depends on the generality of the relevance structures. If many or most relevance structures in a society are generally shared, the scope of institutionalization will be wide. If only few relevance structures are generally shared, the scope of institutionalization will be narrow. In the latter case, there is the further possibility that the institutional order will be highly fragmented, as certain relevance structures are shared by groups within the society but not by the society as a whole.

It may be heuristically useful to think here in terms of ideal-typical extremes. It is possible to conceive of a society in which institutionalization is total. In such a society, *all* problems are common, *all* solutions to these problems are socially objectivated and *all* social actions are institutionalized. The institutional order embraces the totality of social life, which

resembles the continuous performance of a complex, highly stylized liturgy. There is no role-specific distribution of knowledge, or nearly none, since all roles are performed within situations of equal relevance to all the actors. This heuristic model of a totally institutionalized society (a fit topic for nightmares, it might be remarked in passing) can be slightly modified by conceiving that all social actions are institutionalized, *but* not only around common problems. While the style of life such a society would impose on its members would be equally rigid, there would be a greater degree of role-specific distribution of knowledge. A number of liturgies would be going on at the same time, so to speak. Needless to say, neither the model of institutional totality nor its modification can be found in history. Actual societies can, however, be considered in terms of their approximation to this extreme type. It is then possible to say that primitive societies approximate the type to a much higher degree than civilized ones.<sup>44</sup> It may even be said that in the development of archaic civilizations there is a progressive movement away from this type.<sup>45</sup>

The opposite extreme would be a society in which there is only *one* common problem, and institutionalization occurs *only* with respect to actions concerned with this problem. In such a society there would be almost no common stock of knowledge. Almost all knowledge would be role-specific. In terms of macroscopic societies, even approximations of this type are historically unavailable. But certain approximations can be found in smaller social formations – for example, in libertarian colonies where *common* concerns are limited to economic arrangements, or in military expeditions consisting of a number of tribal or ethnic units whose only *common* problem is the waging of the war.

Apart from stimulating sociological fantasies, such heuristic fictions are useful only in so far as they help to clarify the conditions that favour approximations to them. The most general condition is the degree of division of labour, with the concomitant differentiation of institutions.<sup>46</sup> Any society in which there is increasing division of labour is moving away from the first extreme type described above. Another general condition, closely related to the previous one, is availability of an economic surplus, which makes it possible for certain indivi-

duals or groups to engage in specialized activities not directly concerned with subsistence.<sup>47</sup> These specialized activities, as we have seen, lead to specialization and segmentation in the common stock of knowledge. And the latter makes possible knowledge subjectively detached from *any* social relevance, that is, 'pure theory'.<sup>48</sup> This means that certain individuals are (to return to a previous example) freed from hunting not only to forge weapons but also to fabricate myths. Thus we have the 'theoretical life', with its luxurious proliferation of specialized bodies of knowledge, administered by specialists whose social prestige may actually depend upon their inability to do anything except theorize – which leads to a number of analytic problems to which we shall return later.

Institutionalization is not, however, an irreversible process, despite the fact that institutions, once formed, have a tendency to persist.<sup>49</sup> For a variety of historical reasons, the scope of institutionalized actions may diminish; de-institutionalization may take place in certain areas of social life.<sup>50</sup> For example, the private sphere that has emerged in modern industrial society is considerably de-institutionalized as compared to the public sphere.<sup>51</sup>

A further question, with respect to which institutional orders will vary historically, is: What is the relationship of the various institutions to each other, on the levels of performance and meaning?<sup>52</sup> In the first extreme type discussed above, there is a unity of institutional performances and meanings in each subjective biography. The entire social stock of knowledge is actualized in every individual biography. Everybody *does* everything and *knows* everything. The problem of the integration of meanings (that is, of the meaningful relationship of the various institutions) is an exclusively subjective one. The objective sense of the institutional order presents itself to each individual as given and generally known, socially taken for granted as such. If there is any problem at all, it is because of subjective difficulties the individual may have internalizing the socially agreed-upon meanings.

With increasing deviance from this heuristic model (that is, of course, with all actual societies, though not to the same degree) there will be important modifications in the givenness of the institutional meanings. The first two of these we have

already indicated: a segmentation of the institutional order, with only certain types of individuals performing certain actions, and, following that, a social distribution of knowledge, with role-specific knowledge coming to be reserved to certain types. With these developments, however, a new configuration appears on the level of meaning. There will now be an *objective* problem with respect to an encompassing integration of meanings within the entire society. This is an altogether different problem from the merely subjective one of harmonizing the sense one makes of one's biography with the sense ascribed to it by society. The difference is as great as that between producing propaganda that will convince others and producing memoirs that will convince oneself.

In our example of the man/woman/Lesbian triangle we went to some lengths to show that it cannot be assumed *a priori* that different processes of institutionalization will 'hang together'. The relevance structure that is shared by the man and the woman ( $A-B$ ) does not have to be integrated with the one shared by the woman and the Lesbian ( $B-C$ ), or with the one shared by the Lesbian and the man ( $C-A$ ). Discrete institutional processes can continue to coexist without overall integration. We then argued that the empirical fact that institutions *do* hang together, despite the impossibility of assuming this *a priori*, can be accounted for only in reference to the reflective consciousness of individuals who impose a certain logic upon their experience of the several institutions. We can now push this argument one step further by assuming that one of our three individuals (let us assume that it is the man,  $A$ ) becomes dissatisfied with the lack of symmetry in the situation. This does not imply that the relevances in which he shares ( $A-B$  and  $C-A$ ) have changed for him. It is rather the relevance in which he has not previously shared ( $B-C$ ) that now bothers him. This may be because it interferes with his own interests ( $C$  spends too much time making love with  $B$  and neglects her flower-arranging activities with him), or it may be that he has theoretical ambitions. In any case, he wants to unite the three discrete relevances and their concomitant habitualization processes into a cohesive, meaningful whole -  $A-B-C$ . How can he do this?

Let us imagine him a religious genius. One day he presents

the other two with a new mythology. The world was created in two stages, the dry land by the creator god copulating with his sister, the sea in an act of mutual masturbation by the latter and a twin goddess. And when the world was thus made, the creator god joined the twin goddess in the great flower dance, and in this way there came to be flora and fauna on the face of the dry land. The existing triangulation of heterosexuality, Lesbianism and flower cultivation is thus nothing less than a human imitation of the archetypal actions of the gods. Not bad? The reader with some background in comparative mythology will have no difficulty finding historical parallels to this cosmogonic vignette. Our man may have more difficulty getting the others to accept his theory. He will have a problem of propaganda. If, however, we assume that  $B$  and  $C$  have also had practical difficulties in keeping their various projects going, or (less likely) that they are inspired by  $A$ 's vision of the cosmos, there is a good chance that he will be able to put his scheme over. Once he has succeeded and all three individuals 'know' that their several actions work together for the great society (which is  $A-B-C$ ), this 'knowledge' will influence what goes on in the situation. For instance,  $C$  may be more amenable to budgeting her time in an equitable way between her two major enterprises.

If this extension of our example seems far-fetched, we can bring it closer to home by imagining a secularization process in the consciousness of our religious genius. Mythology no longer seems plausible. The situation has to be explained by social science. This, of course, is very easy. It is evident (to our religious genius turned social scientist, that is) that the two sorts of sexual activity going on in the situation express deep-seated psychological needs of the participants. He 'knows' that to frustrate these needs will lead to 'disfunctional' tensions. On the other hand, it is a fact that our trio sell their flowers for coconuts on the other end of the island. That settles it. Behaviour patterns  $A-B$  and  $B-C$  are functional in terms of the 'personality system', while  $C-A$  is functional in terms of the economic sector of the 'social system'.  $A-B-C$  is nothing but the rational outcome of functional integration on the intersystemic level. Again, if  $A$  is successful in propagandizing his two girls with *this* theory, their 'knowledge'

of the functional imperatives involved in their situation will have certain controlling consequences for their conduct.

*Mutatis mutandis*, the same argument will hold if we transpose it from the face-to-face idyll of our example to the macro-social level. The segmentation of the institutional order and the concomitant distribution of knowledge will lead to the problem of providing integrative meanings that will encompass the society and provide an overall context of objective sense for the individual's fragmented social experience and knowledge. Furthermore, there will be not only the problem of overall meaningful integration, but also a problem of legitimating the institutional activities of one type of actor *vis-à-vis* other types. We may assume that there is a universe of meaning that bestows objective sense on the activities of warriors, farmers, traders and exorcists. This does not mean that there will be no conflict of interests between these types of actors. Even within the common universe of meaning, the exorcists may have a problem of 'explaining' some of their activities to the warriors, and so forth. The methods of such legitimation again vary historically.<sup>53</sup>

Another consequence of institutional segmentation is the possibility of socially segregated sub-universes of meaning. These result from accentuations of role specialization to the point where role-specific knowledge becomes altogether esoteric as against the common stock of knowledge. Such sub-universes of meaning may or may not be submerged from the common view. In certain cases, not only are the cognitive contents of the sub-universe esoteric, but even the existence of the sub-universe and of the collectivity that sustains it may be a secret. Sub-universes of meaning may be socially structured by various criteria – sex, age, occupation, religious inclination, aesthetic taste, and so on. The chance of sub-universes appearing, of course, increases steadily with progressive division of labour and economic surplus. A society with a subsistence economy can have cognitive segregation between men and women, or between old and young warriors, as in the 'secret societies' common in Africa and among American Indians. It may still be able to afford the esoteric existence of a few priests and magicians. Full-blown sub-universes of meaning, such as characterized, say, Hindu castes,

the Chinese literary bureaucracy or the priestly coterie of ancient Egypt, require much more developed solutions of the economic problem.

Like all social edifices of meaning, the sub-universes must be 'carried' by a particular collectivity,<sup>54</sup> that is, by the group that on going produces the meanings in question and within which these meanings have objective reality. Conflict or competition may exist between such groups. On the simplest level, there may be conflict over the allocation of surplus resources to the specialists in question, for example, over exemption from productive labour. Who is to be officially exempt, *all* medicine men, or only those who perform services in the household of the chief? Or, who is to receive a fixed stipend from the authorities, those who cure the sick with herbs or those who do it by going into a trance? Such social conflicts are readily translated into conflicts between rival schools of thought, each seeking to establish itself and to discredit if not liquidate the competitive body of knowledge. In contemporary society, we continue to have such conflicts (socio-economic as well as cognitive) between orthodox medicine and such rivals as chiropractic, homeopathy or Christian Science. In advanced industrial societies, with their immense economic surplus allowing large numbers of individuals to devote themselves full-time to even the obscurest pursuits, pluralistic competition between sub-universes of meaning of every conceivable sort becomes the normal state of affairs.<sup>55</sup>

With the establishment of sub-universes of meaning a variety of perspectives on the total society emerges, each viewing the latter from the angle of one sub-universe. The chiropractor has a different angle on society than the medical school professor, the poet than the business man, the Jew than the Gentile, and so on. It goes without saying that this multiplication of perspectives greatly increases the problem of establishing a stable symbolic canopy for the *entire* society. Each perspective, with whatever appendages of theories or even *Weltanschauungen*, will be related to the concrete social interests of the group that holds it. This does *not* mean, however, that the various perspectives, let alone the theories or *Weltanschauungen*, are nothing but mechanical reflections of the social interests. Especially on the theoretical level it is

quite possible for knowledge to attain a great deal of detachment from the biographical and social interests of the knower. Thus there may be tangible social reasons why Jews have become preoccupied with certain scientific enterprises, but it is impossible to predict scientific positions in terms of their being held by Jews or non-Jews. In other words, the scientific universe of meaning is capable of attaining a good deal of autonomy as against its own social base. Theoretically, though in practice there will be great variations, this holds with any body of knowledge, even with cognitive perspectives on society.

What is more, a body of knowledge, once it is raised to the level of a relatively autonomous sub-universe of meaning, has the capacity to act back upon the collectivity that has produced it. For instance, Jews may become social scientists because they have special problems in society *as* Jews. But once they have been initiated into the social-scientific universe of discourse, they may not only look upon society from an angle that is no longer distinctively Jewish, but even their social activities *as* Jews may change as a result of their newly acquired social-scientific perspectives. The extent of such detachment of knowledge from its existential origins depends upon a considerable number of historical variables (such as the urgency of the social interests involved, the degree of theoretical refinement of the knowledge in question, the social relevance or irrelevance of the latter, and others). The important principle for our general considerations is that the relationship between knowledge and its social base is a dialectical one, that is, knowledge is a social product *and* knowledge is a factor in social change.<sup>56</sup> This principle of the dialectic between social production and the objectivated world that is its product has already been explicated; it is especially important to keep it in mind in any analysis of concrete subuniverses of meaning.

The increasing number and complexity of sub-universes make them increasingly inaccessible to outsiders. They become esoteric enclaves, 'hermetically sealed' (in the sense classically associated with the Hermetic *corpus* of secret lore) to all but those who have been properly initiated into their mysteries. The increasing autonomy of sub-universes makes for special problems of legitimation *vis-à-vis* both outsiders

and insiders. The outsiders have to be *kept out*, sometimes even kept ignorant of the existence of the sub-universe. If, however, they are not so ignorant, and if the sub-universe requires various special privileges and recognitions from the larger society, there is the problem of keeping out the outsiders and at the same time having them acknowledge the legitimacy of this procedure. This is done through various techniques of intimidation, rational and irrational propaganda (appealing to the outsiders' interests and to their emotions), mystification and, generally, the manipulation of prestige symbols. The insiders, on the other hand, have to be *kept in*. This requires the development of both practical and theoretical procedures by which the temptation to escape from the sub-universe can be checked. We shall look at some of the details of this double problem of legitimation later. An illustration may serve for the moment. It is not enough to set up an esoteric sub-universe of medicine. The lay public must be convinced that this is right and beneficial, and the medical fraternity must be held to the standards of the sub-universe. Thus the general population is intimidated by images of the physical doom that follows 'going against doctor's advice'; it is persuaded *not* to do so by the pragmatic benefits of compliance, and by its own horror of illness and death. To underline its authority the medical profession shrouds itself in the age-old symbols of power and mystery, from outlandish costume to incomprehensible language, all of which, of course, are legitimated to the public and to itself in pragmatic terms. Meanwhile the fully accredited inhabitants of the medical world are kept from 'quackery' (that is, from stepping outside the medical sub-universe in thought or action) not only by the powerful external controls available to the profession, but by a whole body of professional knowledge that offers them 'scientific proof' of the folly and even wickedness of such deviance. In other words, an entire legitimating machinery is at work so that laymen will *remain* laymen, and doctors doctors, and (if at all possible) that both will do so happily.

Special problems arise as a result of differential rates of change of institutions and sub-universes.<sup>57</sup> This makes more difficult both the overall legitimation of the institutional order and the specific legitimations of particular institutions or sub-

universes. A feudal society with a modern army, a landed aristocracy having to exist under conditions of industrial capitalism, a traditional religion forced to cope with the popularization of a scientific world view, the coexistence in one society of the theory of relativity and astrology – our contemporary experience is so full of examples of this sort that it is unnecessary to belabour the point. Suffice it to say that, under such conditions, the work of the several legitimators becomes especially strenuous.

A final question of great theoretical interest arising from the historical variability of institutionalization has to do with the manner in which the institutional order is objectified: To what extent is an institutional order, or any part of it, apprehended as a non-human facticity? This is the question of the reification of social reality.<sup>58</sup>

Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity *as if* they were something other than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and, further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. The reified world is, by definition, a dehumanized world. It is experienced by man as a strange facticity, an *opus alienum* over which he has no control rather than as the *opus proprium* of his own productive activity.

It will be clear from our previous discussion of objectivation that, as soon as an objective social world is established, the possibility of reification is never far away.<sup>59</sup> The objectivity of the social world means that it confronts man as something outside of himself. The decisive question is whether he still retains the awareness that, however objectivated, the social world was made by men – and, therefore, can be remade by them. In other words, reification can be described as an extreme step in the process of objectivation, whereby the objectivated world loses its comprehensibility as a human enterprise and becomes fixated as a non-human, non-humanizable, inert facticity.<sup>60</sup> Typically, the real relationship between man and

his world is reversed in consciousness. Man, the producer of a world, is apprehended as its product, and human activity as an epiphenomenon of non-human processes. Human meanings are no longer understood as world-producing but as being, in their turn, products of the 'nature of things'. It must be emphasized that reification is a modality of consciousness, more precisely, a modality of man's objectification of the human world. Even while apprehending the world in reified terms, man continues to produce it. That is, man is capable paradoxically of producing a reality that denies him.<sup>61</sup>

Reification is possible on both the pre-theoretical and theoretical levels of consciousness. Complex theoretical systems can be described as reifications, though presumably they have their roots in pre-theoretical reifications established in this or that social situation. Thus it would be an error to limit the concept of reification to the mental constructions of intellectuals. Reification exists in the consciousness of the man in the street and, indeed, the latter presence is more practically significant. It would also be a mistake to look at reification as a perversion of an originally non-reified apprehension of the social world, a sort of cognitive fall from grace. On the contrary, the available ethnological and psychological evidence seems to indicate the opposite, namely, that the original apprehension of the social world is highly reified both phylogenetically and ontogenetically.<sup>62</sup> This implies that an apprehension of reification *as* a modality of consciousness is dependent upon an at least relative *de*-reification of consciousness, which is a comparatively late development in history and in any individual biography.

Both the institutional order as a whole and segments of it may be apprehended in reified terms. For example, the entire order of society may be conceived of as of a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm of the total universe as made by the gods. Whatever happens 'here below' is but a pale reflection of what takes place 'up above'.<sup>63</sup> Particular institutions may be apprehended in similar ways. The basic 'recipe' for the reification of institutions is to bestow on them an ontological status independent of human activity and signification. Specific reifications are variations on this general theme. Marriage, for instance, may be reified as an imitation of divine acts of

creativity, as a universal mandate of natural laws, as the necessary consequence of biological or psychological forces, or, for that matter, as a functional imperative of the social system. What all these reifications have in common is their obfuscation of marriage as an ongoing human production. As can be readily seen in this example, the reification may occur both theoretically and pre-theoretically. Thus the mystagogue can concoct a highly sophisticated theory reaching out from the concrete human event to the farthest corners of the divine cosmos, but an illiterate peasant couple being married may apprehend the event with a similarly reifying shudder of metaphysical dread. Through reification, the world of institutions appears to merge with the world of nature. It becomes necessity and fate, and is lived through as such, happily or unhappily as the case may be.

Roles may be reified in the same manner as institutions. The sector of self-consciousness that has been objectified in the role is then also apprehended as an inevitable fate, for which the individual may disclaim responsibility. The paradigmatic formula for this kind of reification is the statement 'I have no choice in the matter, I have to act this way because of my position' – as husband, father, general, archbishop, chairman of the board, gangster or hangman, as the case may be. This means that the reification of roles narrows the subjective distance that the individual may establish between himself and his role-playing. The distance implied in all objectification remains, of course, but the distance brought about by disidentification shrinks to the vanishing point. Finally, identity itself (the total self, if one prefers) may be reified, both one's own and that of others. There is then a total identification of the individual with his socially assigned typifications. He is apprehended as *nothing but* that type. This apprehension may be positively or negatively accented in terms of values or emotions. The identification of 'Jew' may be equally reifying for the anti-Semite and the Jew himself, except that the latter will accent the identification positively and the former negatively. Both reifications bestow an ontological and total status on a typification that is humanly produced and that, even as it is internalized, objectifies but a segment of the self.<sup>64</sup> Once more, such reifications may range from the pre-theoretical level of

'what everybody knows about Jews' to the most complex theories of Jewishness as a manifestation of biology ('Jewish blood'), psychology ('the Jewish soul') or metaphysics ('the mystery of Israel').

The analysis of reification is important because it serves as a standing corrective to the reifying propensities of theoretical thought in general and sociological thought in particular. It is particularly important for the sociology of knowledge, because it prevents it from falling into an undialectical conception of the relationship between what men do and what they think. The historical and empirical application of the sociology of knowledge must take special note of the social circumstances that favour de-reification – such as the overall collapse of institutional orders, the contact between previously segregated societies, and the important phenomenon of social marginality.<sup>65</sup> These problems, however, exceed the framework of our present considerations.