Prefatory Note

An introductory discussion of concepts can hardly be dispensed with, in spite of the fact that it is unavoidably abstract and hence gives the impression of remoteness from reality. The method employed makes no claim to any kind of novelty. On the contrary it attempts only to formulate what all empirical sociology really means when it deals with the same problems, in what it is hoped is a more convenient and somewhat more exact terminology, even though on that account it may seem pedantic. This is true even where terms are used which are apparently new or unfamiliar. As compared to the author's essay in Logos, the terminology has been simplified as far as possible and hence considerably changed in order to render it more easily understandable. The most precise formulation cannot always be reconciled with a form which can readily be popularized. In such cases the latter aim has had to be sacrificed.

On the concept of "understanding" compare the Allgemeine Psychopathologie of Karl Jaspers, also a few observations by Heinrich Rickert in the second edition of the Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung and particularly some of Simmel's discussions in the Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie. For certain methodological considerations the reader may here be referred, as often before in the author's writings, to the procedure of Friedrich Gottl in his work Die Herrschaft des Wortes; this book, to be sure, is written in a somewhat difficult style and its argument does not appear everywhere to have been thoroughly thought through. As regards content, reference may be made...
especially to the fine work of Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, and also to the gravely misleading book of Rudolf Stammerser, *Wirtschaft und Recht nach der materialistischen Geschichtsauffassung*, which may be compared with my criticism in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft* (vol. 14, 1907, [GAzW, 291-359]). This critical essay contains many of the fundamental ideas of the following exposition. The present work departs from Simmel's method (in his *Soziologie* and his *Philosophie des Geldes*) in drawing a sharp distinction between subjectively intended and objectively valid "meanings"; two different things which Simmel not only fails to distinguish but often deliberately treats as belonging together.

1. *The Definition of Sociology and of Social Action*

Sociology (in the sense in which this highly ambiguous word is used here) is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. We shall speak of "action" insofar as the acting individual attaches a subjective meaning to his behavior—be it overt or covert, omission or acquiescence. Action is "social" insofar as its subjective meaning takes account of the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course.

2. **Methodological Foundations**

1. "Meaning" may be of two kinds. The term may refer first to the actual existing meaning in the given concrete case of a particular actor, or to the average or approximate meaning attributable to a given plurality of actors; or secondly to the theoretically conceived *pure type* of subjective meaning attributed to the hypothetical actor or actors in a given type of action. In no case does it refer to an objectively "correct" meaning or one which is "true" in some metaphysical sense. It is this which distinguishes the empirical sciences of action, such as sociology and history, from the dogmatic disciplines in that area, such as jurisprudence, logic, ethics, and aesthetics, which seek to ascertain the "true" and "valid" meanings associated with the objects of their investigation.

2. The line between meaningful action and merely reactive behavior to which no subjective meaning is attached, cannot be sharply drawn empirically. A very considerable part of all sociologically relevant behavior, especially purely traditional behavior, is marginal between the two. In the case of some psychophysical processes, meaningful, i.e., subjectively understandable, action is not to be found at all; in others it is discernible only by the psychologist. Many mystical experiences which cannot be adequately communicated in words are, for a person who is not susceptible to such experiences, not fully understandable. At the same time the ability to perform a similar action is not a necessary prerequisite to understanding: "one need not have been Caesar in order to understand Caesar." "Recapturing an experience" is important for accurate understanding, but not an absolute precondition for its interpretation. Understandable and non-understandable components of a process are often intermingled and bound up together.

3. All interpretation of meaning, like all scientific observations, strives for clarity and verifiable accuracy of insight and comprehension (*Evidenz*). The basis for certainty in understanding can be either rational, which can be further subdivided into logical and mathematical, or it can be of an emotionally empathic or artistically appreciative quality. Action is rationally evident chiefly when we attain a completely clear intellectual grasp of the action-elements in their intended context of meaning. Empathic or appreciative accuracy is attained when, through sympathetic participation, we can adequately grasp the emotional context in which the action took place. The highest degree of rational understanding is attained in cases involving the meanings of logically or mathematically related propositions; their meaning may be immediately and unambiguously intelligible. We have a perfectly clear understanding of what it means when somebody employs the proposition \(2 \times 2 = 4\) or the Pythagorean theorem in reasoning or argument, or when someone correctly carries out a logical train of reasoning according to our accepted modes of thinking. In the same way we also understand what a person is doing when he tries to achieve certain ends by choosing appropriate means on the basis of the facts of the situation, as experience has accustomed us to interpret them. The interpretation of such rationally purposeful action possesses, for the understanding of the choice of means, the highest degree of verifiable certainty. With a lower degree of certainty, which is, however, adequate for most purposes of explanation, we are able to understand errors, including confusion of problems of the sort that we ourselves are liable to, or the origin of which we can detect by sympathetic self-analysis.

On the other hand, many ultimate ends or values toward which experience shows that human action may be oriented, often cannot be understood completely, though sometimes we are able to grasp them intellectually. The more radically they differ from our own ultimate values, however, the more difficult it is for us to understand them em-
pathically. Depending upon the circumstances of the particular case we must be content either with a purely intellectual understanding of such values or when even that fails, sometimes we must simply accept them as given data. Then we can try to understand the action motivated by them on the basis of whatever opportunities for approximate emotional and intellectual interpretation seem to be available at different points in its course. These difficulties confront, for instance, people not susceptible to unusual acts of religious and charitable zeal, or persons who abhor extreme rationalist fanaticism (such as the fanatic advocacy of the "rights of man").

The more we ourselves are susceptible to such emotional reactions as anxiety, anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, love, enthusiasm, pride, vengefulness, loyalty, devotion, and appetites of all sorts, and to the "irrational" conduct which grows out of them, the more readily can we empathize with them. Even when such emotions are found in a degree of intensity of which the observer himself is completely incapable, he can still have a significant degree of emotional understanding of their meaning and can interpret intellectually their influence on the course of action and the selection of means.

For the purposes of a typological scientific analysis it is convenient to treat all irrational, affectually determined elements of behavior as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action. For example a panic on the stock exchange can be most conveniently analysed by attempting to determine first what the course of action would have been if it had not been influenced by irrational affects; it is then possible to introduce the irrational components as accounting for the observed deviations from this hypothetical course. Similarly, in analysing a political or military campaign it is convenient to determine in the first place what would have been a rational course, given the ends of the participants and adequate knowledge of all the circumstances. Only in this way is it possible to assess the causal significance of irrational factors as accounting for the deviations from this type. The construction of a purely rational course of action in such cases serves the sociologist as a type (ideal type) which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity. By comparison with this it is possible to understand the ways in which actual action is influenced by irrational factors of all sorts, such as affects and errors, in that they account for the deviation from the line of conduct which would be expected on the hypothesis that the action were purely rational.

Only in this respect and for these reasons of methodological convenience is the method of sociology "rationalistic." It is naturally not legitimate to interpret this procedure as involving a rationalistic bias of sociology, but only as a methodological device. It certainly does not involve a belief in the actual predominance of rational elements in human life, for on the question of how far this predominance does or does not exist, nothing whatever has been said. That there is, however, a danger of rationalistic interpretations where they are out of place cannot be denied. All experience unfortunately confirms the existence of this danger.

4. In all the sciences of human action, account must be taken of processes and phenomena which are devoid of subjective meaning, in the role of stimuli, results, favoring or hindering circumstances. To be devoid of meaning is not identical with being lifeless or non-human; every artifact, such as for example a machine, can be understood only in terms of the meaning which its production and use have had or were intended to have; a meaning which may derive from a relation to exceedingly various purposes. Without reference to this meaning such an object remains wholly unintelligible. That which is intelligible or understandable about it is thus its relation to human action in the role either of means or of end; a relation of which the actor or actors can be said to have been aware and to which their action has been oriented. Only in terms of such categories is it possible to "understand" objects of this kind. On the other hand processes or conditions, whether they are animate or inanimate, human or non-human, are in the present sense devoid of meaning in so far as they cannot be related to an intended purpose. That is to say they are devoid of meaning if they cannot be related to action in the role of means or ends but constitute only the stimulus, the favoring or hindering circumstances. It may be that the flooding of the Dollart [at the mouth of the Ems river near the Dutch-German border] in 1277 had historical significance as a stimulus to the beginning of certain migrations of considerable importance. Human mortality, indeed the organic life cycle from the helplessness of infancy to that of old age, is naturally of the very greatest sociological importance through the various ways in which human action has been oriented to these facts. To still another category of facts devoid of meaning belong certain psychic or psychophysical phenomena such as fatigue, habituation, memory, etc.; also certain typical states of euphoria under some conditions of ascetic mortification; finally, typical variations in the reactions of individuals according to reaction-time, precision, and other modes. But in the last analysis the same principle applies to these as to other phenomena which are devoid of meaning. Both the actor and the sociologist must accept them as data to be taken into account.

It is possible that future research may be able to discover non-interpretable uniformities underlying what has appeared to be specif-
ically meaningful action, though little has been accomplished in this direction thus far. Thus, for example, differences in hereditary biological constitution, as of "races," would have to be treated by sociology as given data in the same way as the physiological facts of the need of nutrition or the effect of senescence on action. This would be the case if, and insofar as, we had statistically conclusive proof of their influence on sociologically relevant behavior. The recognition of the causal significance of such factors would not in the least alter the specific task of sociological analysis or of that of the other sciences of action, which is the interpretation of action in terms of its subjective meaning. The effect would be only to introduce certain non-interpretable data of the same order as others which are already present, into the complex of subjectively understandable motivation at certain points. (Thus it may come to be known that there are typical relations between the frequency of certain types of teleological orientation of action or of the degree of certain kinds of rationality and the cephalic index or skin color or any other biologically inherited characteristic.)

5. Understanding may be of two kinds: the first is the direct observational understanding of the subjective meaning of a given act as such, including verbal utterances. We thus understand by direct observation, in this case, the meaning of the proposition $2 \times 2 = 4$ when we hear or read it. This is a case of the direct rational understanding of ideas. We also understand an outbreak of anger as manifested by facial expression, exclamations or irrational movements. This is direct observational understanding of irrational emotional reactions. We can understand in a similar observational way the action of a woodcutter or of somebody who reaches for the knob to shut a door or who aims a gun at an animal. This is rational observational understanding of actions.

Understanding may, however, be of another sort, namely explanatory understanding. Thus we understand in terms of motive the meaning an actor attaches to the proposition twice two equals four, when he states it or writes it down, in that we understand what makes him do this at precisely this moment and in these circumstances. Understanding in this sense is attained if we know that he is engaged in balancing a ledger or in making a scientific demonstration, or is engaged in some other task of which this particular act would be an appropriate part. This is rational understanding of motivation, which consists in placing the act in an intelligible and more inclusive context of meaning. Thus we understand the chopping of wood or aiming of a gun in terms of motive in addition to direct observation if we know that the woodcutter is working for a wage or is chopping a supply of firewood for his own use or possibly is doing it for recreation. But he might also be working off a fit of rage, an irrational case. Similarly we understand the motive of a person aiming a gun if we know that he has been commanded to shoot as a member of a firing squad, that he is fighting against an enemy, or that he is doing it for revenge. The last is affectually determined and thus in a certain sense irrational. Finally we have a motivational understanding of the outburst of anger if we know that it has been provoked by jealousy, injured pride, or an insult. The last examples are all affectually determined and hence derived from irrational motives. In all the above cases the particular act has been placed in an understandable sequence of motivation, the understanding of which can be treated as an explanation of the actual course of behavior. Thus for a science which is concerned with the subjective meaning of action, explanation requires a grasp of the complex of meaning in which an actual course of understandable action thus interpreted belongs. In all such cases, even where the processes are largely affectual, the subjective meaning of the action, including that also of the relevant meaning complexes, will be called the intended meaning. (This involves a departure from ordinary usage, which speaks of intention in this sense only in the case of rationally purposive action.)

6. In all these cases understanding involves the interpretive grasp of the meaning present in one of the following contexts: (a) as in the historical approach, the actually intended meaning for concrete individual action; or (b) as in cases of sociological mass phenomena, the average of, or an approximation to, the actually intended meaning; or (c) the meaning appropriate to a scientifically formulated pure type (an ideal type) of a common phenomenon. The concepts and "laws" of pure economic theory are examples of this kind of ideal type. They state what course a given type of human action would take if it were strictly rational, unaffected by errors or emotional factors and if, furthermore, it were completely and unequivocally directed to a single end, the maximization of economic advantage. In reality, action takes exactly this course only in unusual cases, as sometimes on the stock exchange; and even then there is usually only an approximation to the ideal type. (On the purpose of such constructions, see my essay in AsS, 19 [cf. n. 5] and point 11 below.)

Every interpretation attempts to attain clarity and certainty, but no matter how clear an interpretation as such appears to be from the point of view of meaning, it cannot on this account claim to be the causally valid interpretation. On this level it must remain only a peculiarly plausible hypothesis. In the first place the "conscious motives" may well, even to the actor himself, conceal the various "motives" and "repressions" which constitute the real driving force of his action. Thus in such cases even subjectively honest self-analysis has only a relative value. Then it
is the task of the sociologist to be aware of this motivational situation and to describe and analyse it, even though it has not actually been concretely part of the conscious intention of the actor; possibly not at all, at least not fully. This is a borderline case of the interpretation of meaning. Secondly, processes of action which seem to an observer to be the same or similar may fit into exceedingly various complexes of motive in the case of the actual actor. Then even though the situations appear superficially to be very similar we must actually understand them or interpret them as very different, perhaps, in terms of meaning, directly opposed. (Simmel, in his Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie, gives a number of examples.) Third, the actors in any given situation are often subject to opposing and conflicting impulses, all of which we are able to understand. In a large number of cases we know from experience it is not possible to arrive at even an approximate estimate of the relative strength of conflicting motives and very often we cannot be certain of our interpretation. Only the actual outcome of the conflict gives a solid basis of judgment.

More generally, verification of subjective interpretation by comparison with the concrete course of events is, as in the case of all hypotheses, indispensable. Unfortunately this type of verification is feasible with relative accuracy only in the few very special cases susceptible of psychological experimentation. In very different degrees of approximation, such verification is also feasible in the limited number of cases of mass phenomena which can be statistically described and unambiguously interpreted. For the rest there remains only the possibility of comparing the largest possible number of historical or contemporary processes which, while otherwise similar, differ in the one decisive point of their relation to the particular motive or factor the role of which is being investigated. This is a fundamental task of comparative sociology. Often, unfortunately, there is available only the uncertain procedure of the "imaginary experiment" which consists in thinking away certain elements of a chain of motivation and working out the course of action which would then probably ensue, thus arriving at a causal judgment.  

For example, the generalization called Gresham's Law is a rationally clear interpretation of human action under certain conditions and under the assumption that it will follow a purely rational course. How far any actual course of action corresponds to this can be verified only by the available statistical evidence for the actual disappearance of under-valued monetary units from circulation. In this case our information serves to demonstrate a high degree of accuracy. The facts of experience were known before the generalization, which was formulated afterwards; but without this successful interpretation our need for causal understand-

ing would evidently be left unsatisfied. On the other hand, without the demonstration that what can here be assumed to be a theoretically adequate interpretation also is in some degree relevant to an actual course of action, a "law," no matter how fully demonstrated theoretically, would be worthless for the understanding of action in the real world. In this case the correspondence between the theoretical interpretation of motivation and its empirical verification is entirely satisfactory and the cases are numerous enough so that verification can be considered established. But to take another example, Eduard Meyer has advanced an ingenious theory of the causal significance of the battles of Marathon, Salamis, and Platea for the development of the cultural peculiarities of Greek, and hence, more generally, Western, civilization. 11 This is derived from a meaningful interpretation of certain symptomatic facts having to do with the attitudes of the Greek oracles and prophets towards the Persians. It can only be directly verified by reference to the examples of the conduct of the Persians in cases where they were victorious, as in Jerusalem, Egypt, and Asia Minor, and even this verification must necessarily remain unsatisfactory in certain respects. The striking rational plausibility of the hypothesis must here necessarily be relied on as a support. In very many cases of historical interpretation which seem highly plausible, however, there is not even a possibility of the order of verification which was feasible in this case. Where this is true the interpretation must necessarily remain a hypothesis.

7. A motive is a complex of subjective meaning which seems to the actor himself or to the observer an adequate ground for the conduct in question. The interpretation of a coherent course of conduct is "subjectively adequate" (or "adequate on the level of meaning"), insofar as, according to our habitual modes of thought and feeling, its component parts taken in their mutual relation are recognized to constitute a "typical" complex of meaning. 12 It is more common to say "correct." The interpretation of a sequence of events will on the other hand be called causally adequate insofar as, according to established generalizations from experience, there is a probability that it will always actually occur in the same way. An example of adequacy on the level of meaning in this sense is what is, according to our current norms of calculation or thinking, the correct solution of an arithmetical problem. On the other hand, a causally adequate interpretation of the same phenomenon would concern the statistical probability that, according to verified generalizations from experience, there would be a correct or an erroneous solution of the same problem. This also refers to currently accepted norms but includes taking account of typical errors or of typical confusions. Thus causal explanation depends on being able to determine that there is a
probability, which in the rare ideal case can be numerically stated, but is always in some sense calculable, that a given observable event (overt or subjective) will be followed or accompanied by another event.

A correct causal interpretation of a concrete course of action is arrived at when the overt action and the motives have both been correctly apprehended and at the same time their relation has become meaningfully comprehensible. A correct causal interpretation of typical action means that the process which is claimed to be typical is shown to be both adequately grasped on the level of meaning and at the same time the interpretation is to some degree causally adequate. If inadequacy in respect to meaning is lacking, then no matter how high the degree of uniformity and how precisely its probability can be numerically determined, it is still an incomprehensible statistical probability, whether we deal with overt or subjective processes. On the other hand, even the most perfect adequacy on the level of meaning has causal significance from a sociological point of view only insofar as there is some kind of proof for the existence of a probability that action in fact normally takes the course which has been held to be meaningful. For this there must be some degree of determinable frequency of approximation to an average or a pure type.

Statistical uniformities constitute understandable types of action, and thus constitute sociological generalizations, only when they can be regarded as manifestations of the understandable subjective meaning of a course of social action. Conversely, formulations of a rational course of subjectively understandable action constitute sociological types of empirical process only when they can be empirically observed with a significant degree of approximation. By no means is the actual likelihood of the occurrence of a given course of overt action always directly proportional to the clarity of subjective interpretation. Only actual experience can prove whether this is so in a given case. There are statistics of processes devoid of subjective meaning, such as death rates, phenomena of fatigue, the production rate of machines, the amount of rainfall, in exactly the same sense as there are statistics of meaningful phenomena. But only the phenomena are meaningful do we speak of sociological statistics. Examples are such cases as crime rates, occupational distributions, price statistics, and statistics of crop acreage. Naturally there are many cases where both components are involved, as in crop statistics.

8. Processes and uniformities which it has here seemed convenient not to designate as sociological phenomena or uniformities because they are not "understandable," are naturally not on that account any the less important. This is true even for sociology in our sense which is restricted
to subjectively understandable phenomena—a usage which there is no intention of attempting to impose on anyone else. Such phenomena, however important, are simply treated by a different method from the others; they become conditions, stimuli, furthering or hindering circumstances of action.

9. Action in the sense of subjectively understandable orientation of behavior exists only as the behavior of one or more individual human beings. For other cognitive purposes it may be useful or necessary to consider the individual, for instance, as a collection of cells, as a complex of bio-chemical reactions, or to conceive his psychic life as made up of a variety of different elements, however these may be defined. Undoubtedly such procedures yield valuable knowledge of causal relationships. But the behavior of these elements, as expressed in such uniformities, is not subjectively understandable. This is true even of psychic elements because the more precisely they are formulated from a point of view of natural science, the less they are accessible to subjective understanding. This is never the road to interpretation in terms of subjective meaning. On the contrary, both for sociology in the present sense, and for history, the object of cognition is the subjective meaning complex of action. The behavior of physiological entities such as cells, or of any sort of psychic elements, may at least in principle be observed and an attempt made to derive uniformities from such observations. It is further possible to attempt, with their help, to obtain a causal explanation of individual phenomena, that is, to subsume them under uniformities. But the subjective understanding of action takes the same account of this type of fact and uniformity as of any others not capable of subjective interpretation. (This is true, for example, of physical, astronomical, geological, meteorological, geographical, botanical, zoological, and anatomical facts, of those aspects of psycho-pathology which are devoid of subjective meaning, or of the natural conditions of technological processes.)

For still other cognitive purposes—for instance, juristic ones—or for practical ends, it may on the other hand be convenient or even indispensable to treat social collectivities, such as states, associations, business corporations, foundations, as if they were individual persons. Thus they may be treated as the subjects of rights and duties or as the performers of legally significant actions. But for the subjective interpretation of action in sociological work these collectivities must be treated as solely the resultants and modes of organization of the particular acts of individual persons, since these alone can be treated as agents in a course of subjectively understandable action. Nevertheless, the sociologist cannot for his purposes afford to ignore these collective concepts derived from other disciplines. For the subjective interpretation of action has at least three
important relations to these concepts. In the first place it is often necessary to employ very similar collective concepts, indeed often using the same terms, in order to obtain an intelligible terminology. Thus both in legal terminology and in everyday speech the term "state" is used both for the legal concept of the state and for the phenomena of social action to which its legal rules are relevant. For sociological purposes, however, the phenomenon "the state" does not consist necessarily or even primarily of the elements which are relevant to legal analysis; and for sociological purposes there is no such thing as a collective personality which "acts." When reference is made in a sociological context to a state, a nation, a corporation, a family, or similar collectivities, what is meant is, on the contrary, only a certain kind of development of actual or possible social actions of individual persons. Both because of its precision and because it is established in general usage the juristic concept is taken over, but is used in an entirely different meaning.

Secondly, the subjective interpretation of action must take account of a fundamentally important fact. These concepts of collective entities which are found both in common sense and in juristic and other technical forms of thought, have a meaning in the minds of individual persons, partly as of something actually existing, partly as something with normative authority. This is true not only of judges and officials, but of ordinary private individuals as well. Actors thus in part orient their action to them, and in this role such ideas have a powerful, often a decisive, causal influence on the course of action of real individuals. This is above all true where the ideas involve normative prescription or prohibition. Thus, for instance, one of the important aspects of the existence of a modern state, precisely as a complex of social interaction of individual persons, consists in the fact that the action of various individuals is oriented to the belief that it exists or should exist, thus that its acts and laws are valid in the legal sense. This will be further discussed below. Though extremely pedantic and cumbersome, it would be possible, if purposes of sociological terminology alone were involved, to eliminate such terms entirely, and substitute newly-coined words. This would be possible even though the word "state" is used ordinarily not only to designate the legal concept but also the real process of action. But in the above important connexion, at least, this would naturally be impossible.

Thirdly, it is the method of the so-called "organic" school of sociology—classical example: Schaffle's brilliant work, Bau und Leben des sozialen Körpers—to attempt to understand social interaction by using as a point of departure the "whole" within which the individual acts. His action and behavior are then interpreted somewhat in the way that a physiologist would treat the role of an organ of the body in the "economy" of the organism, that is from the point of view of the survival of the latter. (Compare the famous dictum of a well-known physiologist: "Sec. 10. The spleen. Of the spleen, gentlemen, we know nothing. So much for the spleen." Actually, of course, he knew a good deal about the spleen—its position, size, shape, etc.; but he could say nothing about its function, and it was his inability to do this that he called "ignorance.") How far in other disciplines this type of functional analysis of the relation of "parts" to a "whole" can be regarded as definitive, cannot be discussed here; but it is well known that the bio-chemical and bio-physical modes of analysis of the organism are on principle opposed to stopping there. For purposes of sociological analysis two things can be said. First this functional frame of reference is convenient for purposes of practical illustration and for provisional orientation. In these respects it is not only useful but indispensable. But at the same time if its cognitive value is overestimated and its concepts illegitimately "reified," it can be highly dangerous. Secondly, in certain circumstances this is the only available way of determining just what processes of social action it is important to understand in order to explain a given phenomenon. But this is only the beginning of sociological analysis as here understood. In the case of social collectivities, precisely as distinguished from organisms, we are in a position to go beyond merely demonstrating functional relationships and uniformities. We can accomplish something which is never attainable in the natural sciences, namely the subjective understanding of the action of the component individuals. The natural sciences on the other hand cannot do this, being limited to the formulation of causal uniformities in objects and events and the explanation of individual facts by applying them. We do not "understand" the behavior of cells, but can only observe the relevant functional relationships and generalize on the basis of these observations. This additional achievement of explanation by interpretive understanding, as distinguished from external observation, is of course attained only at a price—the more hypothetical and fragmentary character of its results. Nevertheless, subjective understanding is the specific characteristic of sociological knowledge.

It would lead too far afield even to attempt to discuss how far the behavior of animals is subjectively understandable to us and vice versa; in both cases the meaning of the term understanding and its extent of application would be highly problematical. But in so far as such understanding existed it would be theoretically possible to formulate a sociology of the relations of men to animals, both domestic and wild. Thus many animals "understand" commands, anger, love, hostility, and react to them in ways which are evidently often by no means purely instinctive.
and mechanical and in some sense both consciously meaningful and affected by experience. In a way, our ability to share the feelings of primitive men is not very much greater. We either do not have any reliable means of determining the subjective state of mind of an animal or what we have is at best very unsatisfactory. It is well known that the problems of animal psychology, however interesting, are very thorny ones. There are in particular various forms of social organization among animals: monogamous and polygamous "families," herds, flocks, and finally "states," with a functional division of labour. (The extent of functional differentiation found in these animal societies is by no means, however, entirely a matter of the degree of organic or morphological differentiation of the individual members of the species. Thus, the functional differentiation found among the termites, and in consequence that of the products of their social activities, is much more advanced in the case of the bees and ants.) In this field it goes without saying that a purely functional point of view is the best that can, at least for the present, be attained, and the investigator must be content with it. Thus it is possible to study the ways in which the species provides for its survival; that is, for nutrition, defence, reproduction, and reconstruction of the social units. As the principal bearers of these functions, differentiated types of individuals can be identified: "kings," "queens," "workers," "soldiers," "drones," "propagators," "queen's substitutes," and so on. Anything more than that was for a long time merely a matter of speculation or of an attempt to determine the extent to which heredity on the one hand and environment on the other would be involved in the development of these "social" proclivities. This was particularly true of the controversies between Götze and Weismann. The latter's conception in Die Allmacht der Naturzüchtung was largely based on wholly non-empirical deductions. But all serious authorities are naturally fully agreed that the limitation of analysis to the functional level is only a necessity imposed by our present ignorance, which it is hoped will only be temporary. (For an account of the state of knowledge of the termites, for example, see the study by Karl Escherich, Die Termiten oder weissen Ameisen, 1909.)

The researchers would like to understand not only the relatively obvious survival functions of these various differentiated types, but also the bearing of different variants of the theory of heredity or its reverse on the problem of explaining how these differentiations have come about. Moreover, they would like to know first what factors account for the original differentiation of specialized types from the still neutral undifferentiated species-type. Secondly, it would be important to know what leads the differentiated individual in the typical case to behave in a way which actually serves the survival value of the organized group. Wherever research has made any progress in the solution of these problems it has been through the experimental demonstration of the probability or possibility of the role of chemical stimuli or physiological processes, such as nutritional states, the effects of parasitic castration, etc., in the case of the individual organism. How far there is even a hope that the existence of "subjective" or "meaningful" orientation could be made experimentally probable, even the specialist today would hardly be in a position to say. A verifiable conception of the state of mind of these social animals accessible to meaningful understanding, would seem to be attainable even as an ideal goal only within narrow limits. However that may be, a contribution to the understanding of human social action is hardly to be expected from this quarter. On the contrary, in the field of animal psychology, human analogies are and must be continually employed. The most that can be hoped for is, then, that these biological analogies may some day be useful in suggesting significant problems. For instance they may throw light on the question of the relative role in the early stages of human social differentiation of mechanical and instinctive factors, as compared with that of the factors which are accessible to subjective interpretation generally, and more particularly to the role of consciously rational action. It is necessary for the sociologist to be thoroughly aware of the fact that in the early stages even of human development, the first set of factors is completely predominant. Even in the later stages he must take account of their continual interaction with the others in a role which is often of decisive importance. This is particularly true of all "traditional" action and of many aspects of charisma, which contain the seeds of certain types of psychic "contagion" and thus give rise to new social developments. These types of action are very closely related to phenomena which are understandable either only in biological terms or can be interpreted in terms of subjective motives only in fragments. But all these facts do not discharge sociology from the obligation, in full awareness of the narrow limits to which it is confined, to accomplish what it alone can do.

The various works of Othmar Spann [1878–1950] are often full of suggestive ideas though at the same time he is guilty of occasional misunderstandings and above all of arguing on the basis of pure value judgments which have no place in an empirical investigation. But he is undoubtedly correct in doing something to which, however, no one seriously objects, namely, emphasizing the sociological significance of the functional point of view for preliminary orientation to problems. This is what he calls the "universalistic method." It is true that we must know what kind of action is functionally necessary for "survival," but even
more so for the maintenance of a cultural type and the continuity of the corresponding modes of social action, before it is possible even to inquire how this action has come about and what motives determine it. It is necessary to know what a "king," an "official," an "entrepreneur," a "procure," or a "magician" does, that is, what kind of typical action, which justifies classifying an individual in one of these categories, is important and relevant for an analysis, before it is possible to undertake the analysis itself. (This is what Rickert means by Werbezogenheit.) But it is only this analysis itself which can achieve the sociological understanding of the actions of typically differentiated human (and only human) individuals, and which hence constitutes the specific function of sociology. It is a tremendous misunderstanding to think that an "individualistic" method should involve what is in any conceivable sense an individualistic system of values. It is as important to avoid this error as the related one which confuses the unavoidable tendency of sociological concepts to assume a rationalistic character with a belief in the predominance of rational motives, or even a positive valuation of rationalism. Even a socialistic economy would have to be understood sociologically in exactly the same kind of "individualistic" terms; that is, in terms of the action of individuals, the types of officials found in it, as would be the case with a system of free exchange analyzed in terms of the theory of marginal utility or a "better," but in this respect similar theory). The real empirical sociological investigation begins with the question: What motives determine and lead the individual members and participants in this socialistic community to behave in such a way that the community came into being in the first place and that it continues to exist? Any form of functional analysis which proceeds from the whole to the parts can accomplish only a preliminary preparation for this investigation—a preparation, the utility and indispensability of which, if properly carried out, is naturally beyond question.

10. It is customary to designate various sociological generalizations, as for example "Gresham's Law," as "laws." These are in fact typical probabilities confirmed by observation to the effect that under certain given conditions an expected course of social action will occur, which is understandable in terms of the typical motives and typical subjective intentions of the actors. These generalizations are both understandable and definite in the highest degree insofar as the typically observed course of action can be understood in terms of the purely rational pursuit of an end, or where for reasons of methodological convenience a theoretical type can be heuristically employed. In such cases the relations of means and end will be clearly understandable on grounds of experience, particularly where the choice of means was "inevitable." In such cases it is legitimate to assert that insofar as the action was rigorously rational it could not have taken any other course because for technical reasons, given their clearly defined ends, no other means were available to the actors. This very case demonstrates how erroneous it is to regard any kind of psychology as the ultimate foundation of the sociological interpretation of action. The term psychology, to be sure, is today understood in a wide variety of senses. For certain quite specific methodological purposes the type of treatment which attempts to follow the procedures of the natural sciences employs a distinction between "physical" and "psychic" phenomena which is entirely foreign to the disciplines concerned with human action, at least in the present sense. The results of a type of psychological investigation which employs the methods of the natural sciences in any one of various possible ways may naturally, like the results of any other science, have outstanding significance for sociological problems; indeed this has often happened. But this use of the results of psychology is something quite different from the investigation of human behavior in terms of its subjective meaning. Hence sociology has no closer relationship on a general analytical level to this type of psychology than to any other science. The source of error lies in the concept of the "psychic." It is held that everything which is not physical is ipso facto psychic. However, the meaning of a train of mathematical reasoning which a person carries out is not in the relevant sense "psychic." Similarly the rational deliberation of an actor as to whether the results of a given proposed course of action will or will not promote certain specific interests, and the corresponding decision, do not become one bit more understandable by taking "psychological" considerations into account. But it is precisely on the basis of such rational assumptions that most of the laws of sociology, including those of economics, are built up. On the other hand, in explaining the irrationalities of action sociologically, that form of psychology which employs the method of subjective understanding undoubtedly can make decisively important contributions. But this does not alter the fundamental methodological situation.

11. We have taken for granted that sociology seeks to formulate type concepts and generalized uniformities of empirical process. This distinguishes it from history, which is oriented to the causal analysis and explanation of individual actions, structures, and personalities possessing cultural significance. The empirical material which underlies the concepts of sociology consists to a very large extent, though by no means exclusively, of the same concrete processes of action which are dealt with by historians. An important consideration in the formulation of sociological concepts and generalizations is the contribution that sociology
can make toward the causal explanation of some historically and culturally important phenomenon. As in the case of every generalizing science the abstract character of the concepts of sociology is responsible for the fact that, compared with actual historical reality, they are relatively lacking in fullness of concrete content. To compensate for this disadvantage, sociological analysis can offer a greater precision of concepts. This precision is obtained by striving for the highest possible degree of adequacy on the level of meaning. It has already been repeatedly stressed that this aim can be realized in a particularly high degree in the case of concepts and generalizations which formulate rational processes. But sociological investigation attempts to include in its scope various irrational phenomena, such as prophetic, mystic, and affectual modes of action, formulated in terms of theoretical concepts which are adequate on the level of meaning. In all cases, rational or irrational, sociological analysis both abstracts from reality and at the same time helps us to understand it, in that it shows us with what degree of approximation a concrete historical phenomenon can be subsumed under one or more of these concepts. For example, the same historical phenomenon may be in one aspect feudal, in another patrimonial, in another bureaucratic, and in still another charismatic. In order to give a precise meaning to these terms, it is necessary for the sociologist to formulate pure ideal types of the corresponding forms of action which in each case involve the highest possible degree of logical integration by virtue of their complete adequacy on the level of meaning. But precisely because this is true, it is probably seldom if ever that a real phenomenon can be found which corresponds exactly to one of these ideally constructed pure types. The case is similar to a physical reaction which has been calculated on the assumption of an absolute vacuum. Theoretical differentiation (Kasusistik) is possible in sociology only in terms of ideal or pure types. It goes without saying that in addition it is convenient for the sociologist from time to time to employ average types of an empirical statistical character, concepts which do not require methodological discussion. But when reference is made to “typical” cases, the term should always be understood, unless otherwise stated, as meaning ideal types, which may in turn be rational or irrational as the case may be (thus in economic theory they are always rational), but in any case are always constructed with a view to adequacy on the level of meaning.

It is important to realize that in the sociological field as elsewhere, averages, and hence average types, can be formulated with a relative degree of precision only where they are concerned with differences of degree in respect to action which remains qualitatively the same. Such cases do occur, but in the majority of cases of action important to history or sociology the motives which determine it are qualitatively heterogeneous. Then it is quite impossible to speak of an “average” in the true sense. The ideal types of social action which for instance are used in economic theory are thus unrealistic or abstract in that they always ask what course of action would take place if it were purely rational and oriented to economic ends alone. This construction can be used to aid in the understanding of action not purely economically determined but which involves deviations arising from traditional restraints, affects, errors, and the intrusion of other than economic purposes or considerations. This can take place in two ways. First, in analysing the extent to which in the concrete case, or on the average for a class of cases, the action was in part economically determined along with the other factors. Secondly, by throwing the discrepancy between the actual course of events and the ideal type into relief, the analysis of the non-economic motives actually involved is facilitated. The procedure would be very similar in employing an ideal type of mystical orientation, with its appropriate attitude of indifference to worldly things, as a tool for analysing its consequences for the actor’s relation to ordinary life—for instance, to political or economic affairs. The more sharply and precisely the ideal type has been constructed, thus the more abstract and unrealistic in this sense it is, the better it is able to perform its functions in formulating terminology, classifications, and hypotheses. In working out a concrete causal explanation of individual events, the procedure of the historian is essentially the same. Thus in attempting to explain the campaign of 1866, it is indispensable both in the case of Moltke and of Benedek to attempt to construct imaginatively how each, given fully adequate knowledge both of his own situation and of that of his opponent, would have acted. Then it is possible to compare with this the actual course of action and to arrive at a causal explanation of the observed deviations, which will be attributed to such factors as misinformation, strategical errors, logical fallacies, personal temperament, or considerations outside the realm of strategy. Here, too, an ideal-typical construction of rational action is actually employed even though it is not made explicit.

The theoretical concepts of sociology are ideal types not only from the objective point of view, but also in their application to subjective processes. In the great majority of cases actual action goes on in a state of inarticulate half-consciousness or actual unconsciousness of its subjective meaning. The actor is more likely to “be aware” of it in a vague sense than he is to “know” what he is doing or be explicitly self-conscious about it. In most cases, his action is governed by impulse or habit. Only occasionally and, in the uniform action of large numbers, often only in the case of a few individuals, is the subjective meaning of the action, whether
rational or irrational, brought clearly into consciousness. The ideal type of meaningful action where the meaning is fully conscious and explicit is a marginal case. Every sociological or historical investigation, in applying its analysis to the empirical facts, must take this fact into account. But the difficulty need not prevent the sociologist from systematizing his concepts by the classification of possible types of subjective meaning. That is, he may reason as if action actually proceeded on the basis of clearly self-conscious meaning. The resulting deviation from the concrete facts must continually be kept in mind whenever it is a question of this level of concreteness, and must be carefully studied with reference both to degree and kind. It is often necessary to choose between terms which are either clear or unclear. Those which are clear will, to be sure, have the abstractness of ideal types, but they are none the less preferable for scientific purposes. (On all these questions see “Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy.”)

B. SOCIAL ACTION

1. Social action, which includes both failure to act and passive acquiescence, may be oriented to the past, present, or expected future behavior of others. Thus it may be motivated by revenge for a past attack, defense against present, or measures of defense against future aggression. The "others" may be individual persons, and may be known to the actor as such, or may constitute an indefinite plurality and may be entirely unknown as individuals. (Thus, money is a means of exchange which the actor accepts in payment because he orients his action to the expectation that a large but unknown number of individuals he is personally unacquainted with will be ready to accept it in exchange on some future occasion.)

2. Not every kind of action, even of overt action, is "social" in the sense of the present discussion. Overt action is non-social if it is oriented solely to the behavior of inanimate objects. Subjective attitudes constitute social action only so far as they are oriented to the behavior of others. For example, religious behavior is not social if it is simply a matter of contemplation or of solitary prayer. The economic activity of an individual is social only if it takes account of the behavior of someone else. Thus very generally it becomes social insofar as the actor assumes that others will respect his actual control over economic goods. Concretely it is social, for instance, if in relation to the actor's own consumption the future wants of others are taken into account and this becomes one consideration affecting the actor's own saving. Or, in another connexion, production may be oriented to the future wants of other people.

3. Not every type of contact of human beings has a social character; this is rather confined to cases where the actor's behavior is meaningfully oriented to that of others. For example, a mere collision of two bicyclists may be compared to a natural event. On the other hand, their attempt to avoid hitting each other, or whatever insults, blows, or friendly discussion might follow the collision, would constitute "social action."

4. Social action is not identical either with the similar actions of many persons or with every action influenced by other persons. Thus, if at the beginning of a shower a number of people on the street put up their umbrellas at the same time, this would not ordinarily be a case of action mutually oriented to that of each other, but rather of all reacting in the same way to the like need of protection from the rain. It is well known that the actions of the individual are strongly influenced by the mere fact that he is a member of a crowd confined within a limited space. Thus, the subject matter of studies of "crowd psychology," such as those of Le Bon, will be called "action conditioned by crowds." It is also possible for large numbers, though dispersed, to be influenced simultaneously or successively by a source of influence operating similarly on all the individuals, as by means of the press. Here also the behavior of an individual is influenced by his membership in a "mass" and by the fact that he is aware of being a member. Some types of reaction are only made possible by the mere fact that the individual acts as part of a crowd. Others become more difficult under these conditions. Hence it is possible that a particular event or mode of human behavior can give rise to the most diverse kinds of feeling—gaiety, anger, enthusiasm, despair, and passions of all sorts—in a crowd situation which would not occur at all or not nearly so readily if the individual were alone. But for this to happen there need not, at least in many cases, be any meaningful relation between the behavior of the individual and the fact that he is a member of a crowd. It is not proposed in the present sense to call action "social" when it is merely a result of the effect on the individual of the existence of a crowd as such and the action is not oriented to that fact on the level of meaning. At the same time the borderline is naturally highly indefinite. In such cases as that of the influence of the demagogue, there may be a wide variation in the extent to which his mass clientele is affected by a meaningful reaction to the fact of its large numbers; and whatever this relation may be, it is open to varying interpretations.

But furthermore, mere "imitation" of the action of others, such as that on which Tarde has rightly laid emphasis, will not be considered a case of specifically social action if it is purely reactive so that there is no meaningful orientation to the actor imitated. The borderline is, however, so indefinite that it is often hardly possible to discriminate. The mere
fact that a person is found to employ some apparently useful procedure which he learned from someone else does not, however, constitute, in the present sense, social action. Action such as this is not oriented to the action of the other person, but the actor has, through observing the other, become acquainted with certain objective facts; and it is these to which his action is oriented. His action is then causally determined by the action of others, but not meaningfully. On the other hand, if the action of others is imitated because it is fashionable or traditional or exemplary, or lends social distinction, or on similar grounds, it is meaningfully oriented either to the behavior of the source of imitation or of third persons or of both. There are of course all manner of transitional cases between the two types of imitation. Both the phenomena discussed above, the behavior of crowds and imitation, stand on the indefinite borderline of social action. The same is true, as will often appear, of traditionalism and charisma. The reason for the indefiniteness of the line in these and other cases lies in the fact that both the orientation to the behavior of others and the meaning which can be imputed by the actor himself, are by no means always capable of clear determination and are often altogether unconscious and seldom fully self-conscious. Mere "influence" and meaningful orientation cannot therefore always be clearly differentiated on the empirical level. But conceptually it is essential to distinguish them, even though merely reactive imitation may well have a degree of sociological importance at least equal to that of the type which can be called social action in the strict sense. Sociology, it goes without saying, is by no means confined to the study of social action; this is only, at least for the kind of sociology being developed here, its central subject matter, that which may be said to be decisive for its status as a science. But this does not imply any judgment on the comparative importance of this and other factors.

2. Types of Social Action

Social action, like all action, may be oriented in four ways. It may be:

(1) instrumentally rational (zweckrational), that is, determined by expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as "conditions" or "means" for the attainment of the actor’s own rationally pursued and calculated ends;

(2) value-rational (wertrational), that is, determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behavior, independently of its prospects of success;

(3) affectual (especially emotional), that is, determined by the actor’s specific affects and feeling states;

(4) traditional, that is, determined by ingrained habituation.

1. Strictly traditional behavior, like the reactive type of imitation discussed above, lies very close to the borderline of what can justifiably be called meaningfully oriented action, and indeed often on the other side. For it is very often a matter of almost automatic reaction to habitual stimuli which guide behavior in a course which has been repeatedly followed. The great bulk of all everyday action is aimed at the change of a type to which people have become habitually accustomed to this type. Hence, its place in a systematic classification is not merely that of a limiting case because, as will be shown later, attachment to habitual forms can be upheld with varying degrees of self-consciousness and in a variety of senses. In this case the type may shade over into value rationality (Wertrationalität).

2. Purely affectual behavior also stands on the borderline of what can be considered "meaningfully" oriented, and often it, too, goes over the line. It may, for instance, consist in an uncontrolled reaction to some exceptional stimulus. It is a case of sublimation when affectually determined action occurs in the form of conscious release of emotional tension. When this happens it is usually well on the road to rationalization in one or the other or both of the above senses.

3. The orientation of value-rational action is distinguished from the affectual type by its clearly self-conscious formulation of the ultimate values governing the action and the consistently planned orientation of its detailed course to these values. At the same time the two types have a common element, namely that the meaning of the action does not lie in the achievement of a result superior to it, but in the act of specific type of action for its own sake. Action is affectual if it satisfies a need for revenge, sensual gratification, devotion, contemplative bliss, or for working off emotional tensions (irrespective of the level of sublimation).

Examples of pure value-rational orientation would be the actions of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required by duty, honor, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call, personal loyalty, or the importance of some "cause" no matter in what it consists. In our terminology, value-rational action always involves "commands" or "demands" which, in the actor’s opinion, are binding on him. It is only in cases where human action is motivated by the fulfillment of such unconditional demands that it will be called value-rational. This is the case in widely varying degrees, but for the most part only to a relatively slight extent. Nevertheless, it will be shown that the occurrence of this mode of action is important enough to justify its formulation as a distinct type;
though it may be remarked that there is no intention here of attempting to formulate in any sense an exhaustive classification of types of action.

4. Action is instrumentally rational (zweckrational) when the end, the means, and the secondary results are all rationally taken into account and weighed. This involves rational consideration of alternative means to the end, of the relations of the end to the secondary consequences, and finally of the relative importance of different possible ends. Determination of action either in affectual or in traditional terms is thus incompatible with this type. Choice between alternative and conflicting ends and results may well be determined in a value-rational manner. In that case, action is instrumentally rational only in respect to the choice of means. On the other hand, the actor may, instead of deciding between alternative and conflicting ends in terms of a rational orientation to a system of values, simply take them as given subjective wants and arrange them in a scale of consciously assessed relative urgency. He may then orient his action to this scale in such a way that they are satisfied as far as possible in order of urgency, as formulated in the principle of "marginal utility." Value-rational action may thus have various different relations to the instrumentally rational action. From the latter point of view, however, value-rationality is always irrational. Indeed, the more the value to which action is oriented is elevated to the status of an absolute value, the more "irrational" in this sense the corresponding action is. For, the more unconditionally the actor devotes himself to this value for its own sake, to pure sentiment or beauty, to absolute goodness or devotion to duty, the less he is influenced by considerations of the consequences of his action. The orientation of action wholly to the rational achievement of ends without relation to fundamental values is, to be sure, essentially only a limiting case.

5. It would be very unusual to find concrete cases of action, especially of social action, which were oriented only in one or another of these ways. Furthermore, this classification of the modes of orientation of action is in no sense meant to exhaust the possibilities of the field, but only to formulate in conceptually pure form certain sociologically important types to which actual action is more or less closely approximated or, in much the more common case, which constitute its elements. The usefulness of the classification for the purposes of this investigation can only be judged in terms of its results.

3. The Concept of Social Relationship

The term "social relationship" will be used to denote the behavior of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the others and is oriented in these terms. The social relationship thus consists entirely and exclusively in the exist-

ence of a probability that there will be a meaningful course of social action—irrespective, for the time being, of the basis for this probability.

1. Thus, as a defining criterion, it is essential that there should be at least a minimum of mutual orientation of the action of each to that of the others. Its content may be of the most varied nature: conflict, hostility, sexual attraction, friendship, loyalty, or economic exchange. It may involve the fulfillment, the evasion, or the violation of the terms of an agreement; economic, erotic, or some other form of "competition"; common membership in status, national or class groups (provided it leads to social action). Hence, the definition does not specify whether the relation of the actors is co-operative or the opposite.

2. The "meaning" relevant in this context is always a case of the meaning imputed to the parties in a given concrete case, on the average, or in a theoretically formulated pure type—it is never a normatively "correct" or a metaphysically "true" meaning. Even in cases of such forms of social organization as a state, church, association, or marriage, the social relationship consists exclusively in the fact that there has existed, exists, or will exist a probability of action in some definite way appropriate to this meaning. It is vital to be continually clear about this in order to avoid the "reification" of these concepts. A "state," for example, ceases to exist in a sociologically relevant sense whenever there is no longer a probability that certain kinds of meaningfully oriented social action will take place. This probability may be very high or it may be negligibly low. But in any case it is only in the sense and degree in which it does exist that the corresponding social relationship exists. It is impossible to find any other clear meaning for the statement that, for instance, a given "state" exists or has ceased to exist.

3. The subjective meaning need not necessarily be the same for all the parties who are mutually oriented in a given social relationship; there need not in this sense be "reciprocity." "Friendship," "love," "loyalty," "fidelity to contracts," "patriotism," on one side, may well be faced with an entirely different attitude on the other. In such cases the parties associate different meanings with their actions, and the social relationship is insofar objectively "asymmetrical" from the points of view of the two parties. It may nevertheless be a case of mutual orientation insofar as, even though partly or wholly erroneously, one party presumes a particular attitude toward him on the part of the other and orients his action to this expectation. This can, and usually will, have consequences for the course of action and the form of the relationship. A relationship is objectively symmetrical only as, according to the typical expectations of the parties, the meaning for one party is the same as that for the other. Thus the actual attitude of a child to its father may be a least approximately that which the father, in the individual case, on the average or typically, has come to expect. A social relationship in which the attitudes are completely and fully corresponding is in reality a limiting case. But the absence of reciprocity will, for terminological
purposes, be held to exclude the existence of a social relationship only if it actually results in the absence of a mutual orientation of the action of the parties. Here as elsewhere all sorts of transitional cases are the rule rather than the exception.

4. A social relationship can be of a very fleeting character or of varying degrees of permanence. In the latter case there is a probability of the repeated recurrence of the behavior which corresponds to its subjective meaning and hence is expected. In order to avoid fallacious impressions, let it be repeated that it is only the existence of the probability that, corresponding to a given subjective meaning, a certain type of action will take place which constitutes the "existence" of the social relationship. Thus that a "friendship" or a "state" exists or has existed means this and only this: that we, the observers, judge that there is or has been a probability that on the basis of certain kinds of known subjective attitude of certain individuals there will result in the average sense a certain specific type of action. For the purposes of legal reasoning it is essential to be able to decide whether a rule of law does or does not carry legal authority, hence whether a legal relationship does or does not "exist." This type of question is not, however, relevant to sociological problems.

5. The subjective meaning of a social relationship may change, thus a political relationship once based on solidarity may develop into a conflict of interests. In that case it is only a matter of terminological convenience and of the degree of continuity of the change whether we say that a new relationship has come into existence or that the old one continues but has acquired a new meaning. It is also possible for the meaning to be partly constant, partly changing.

6. The meaningful content which remains relatively constant in a social relationship is capable of formulation in terms of maxims which the parties concerned expect to be adhered to by their partners on the average and approximately. The more rational in relation to values or to given ends the action is, the more is this likely to be the case. There is far less possibility of a rational formulation of subjective meaning in the case of a relation of erotic attraction or of personal loyalty or any other affectual type than, for example, in the case of a business contract.

7. The meaning of a social relationship may be agreed upon by mutual consent. This implies that the parties make promises covering their future behavior, whether toward each other or toward third persons. In such cases each party then normally counts, so far as he acts rationally, in some degree on the fact that the other will orient his action to the meaning of the agreement as he (the first actor) understands it. In part he orients his action rationally (zweckrational) to these expectations as given facts with, to be sure, varying degrees of subjectively "loyal" intention of doing his part. But in part also he is motivated value-rationally by a sense of duty, which makes him adhere to the agreement as he understands it. This much may be anticipated. (For a further elaboration, see secs. 9 and 13 below.)


Within the realm of social action certain empirical uniformities can be observed, that is, courses of action that are repeated by the actor or (simultaneously) occur among numerous actors since the subjective meaning is meant to be the same. Sociological investigation is concerned with these typical modes of action. Thereby it differs from history, the subject of which is rather the causal explanation of important individual events; important, that is, in having an influence on human destiny.

If an orientation toward social action occurs regularly, it will be called "usage" (Brauch) insofar as the probability of its existence within a group is based on nothing but actual practice. A usage will be called a "custom" (Sitte) if the practice is based upon long standing. On the other hand, a uniformity of orientation may be said to be "determined by self-interest," if and insofar as the actors' conduct is instrumentally (zweckrational) oriented toward identical expectations.

1. Usage also includes "fashion" (Mode). As distinguished from custom and in direct contrast to it, usage will be called fashion so far as the mere fact of the novelty of the corresponding behavior is the basis of the orientation of action. Its locus is in the neighborhood of "convention," since both of them usually spring from a desire for social prestige. Fashion, however, will not be further discussed here.

2. As distinguished from both "convention" and "law," "custom" refers to rules devoid of any external sanction. The actor conforms with them of his own free will, whether his motivation lies in the fact that he merely fails to think about it, that it is more comfortable to conform, or whatever else the reason may be. For the same reasons he can consider it likely that other members of the group will adhere to a custom.

Thus custom is not "valid" in anything like the legal sense; conformity with it is not "demanded" by anybody. Naturally, the transition from this to validly enforced convention and to law is gradual. Everywhere what has been traditionally handed down has been an important source of what has come to be enforced. Today it is customary every morning to eat a breakfast which, within limits, conforms to a certain pattern. But there is no obligation to do so, except possibly for hotel guests, and it has not always been customary. On the other hand, the current mode of dress, even though it has partly originated in custom, is today very largely no longer customary alone, but conventional.

(On the concepts of usage and custom, the relevant parts of vol. II of R. von Jhering's Zweck im Recht are still worth reading. Compare also, P. Oertmann, Rechtsordnung und Verkehrsritte (1914); and more recently E. Weigelin, Sitte, Recht und Moral (1919), which agrees with the author's position as opposed to that of Stammel.)
3. Many of the especially notable uniformities in the course of social action are not determined by orientation to any sort of norm which is held to be valid, nor do they rest on custom, but entirely on the fact that the corresponding type of social action is in the nature of the case best adapted to the normal interests of the actors as they themselves are aware of them. This is above all true of economic action, for example, the uniformities of price determination in a “free” market, but is by no means confined to such cases. The dealers in a market thus treat their own actions as means for obtaining the satisfaction of the ends defined by what they realize to be their own typical economic interests, and similarly treat as conditions the corresponding typical expectations as to the prospective behavior of others. The more strictly rational (zweckrational) their action is, the more will they tend to react similarly to the same situation. In this way there arise similarities, uniformities, and continuities in their attitudes and actions which are often far more stable than they would be if action were oriented to a system of norms and duties which were considered binding on the members of a group. This phenomenon—the fact that orientation to the situation in terms of the pure self-interest of the individual and of the others to whom he is related can bring about results comparable to those which imposed norms prescribe, very often in vain—has aroused a lively interest, especially in economic affairs. Observation of this has, in fact, been one of the important sources of economics as a science. But it is true in all other spheres of action as well. This type, with its clarity of self-consciousness and freedom from subjective scruples, is the polar antithesis of every sort of unthinking acquiescence in customary ways as well as of devotion to norms consciously accepted as absolute values. One of the most important aspects of the process of “rationalization” of action is the substitution for the unthinking acceptance of ancient custom, of deliberate adaptation to situations in terms of self-interest. To be sure, this process by no means exhausts the concept of rationalization of action. For in addition this can proceed in a variety of other directions; positively in that of a deliberate formulation of ultimate values (Wertrationalisierung); or negatively, at the expense not only of custom, but of emotional values; and, finally, in favor of a morally sceptical type of rationality, at the expense of any belief in absolute values. The many possible meanings of the concept of rationalization will often enter into the discussion. (Further remarks on the analytical problem will be found at the end.)

4. The stability of merely customary action rests essentially on the fact that the person who does not adapt himself to it is subjected to both petty and major inconveniences and annoyances as long as the majority of the people he comes in contact with continue to uphold the custom and conform with it.

Similarly, the stability of action in terms of self-interest rests on the fact that the person who does not orient his action to the interests of others, does not “take account” of them, arouses their antagonism or may end up in a situation different from that which he had foreseen or wished to bring about. He thus runs the risk of damaging his own interests.

5. Legitimate Order

Action, especially social action which involves a social relationship, may be guided by the belief in the existence of a legitimate order. The probability that action will actually be so governed will be called the “validity” (Geltung) of the order in question.

1. Thus, the validity of an order means more than the mere existence of a uniformity of social action determined by custom or self-interest. If furniture movers regularly advertise at the time many leases expire, this uniformity is determined by self-interest. If a salesman visits certain customers on particular days of the month or the week, it is either a case of customary behavior or a product of self-interested orientation. However, when a civil servant appears in his office daily at a fixed time, he does not act only on the basis of custom or self-interest which he could disregard if he wanted to; as a rule, his action is also determined by the validity of an order (viz., the civil service rules), which he fulfills partly because disobedience would be disadvantageous to him but also because its violation would be abhorrent to his sense of duty (of course, in varying degrees).

2. Only then will the content of a social relationship be called an order if the conduct is, approximately or on the average, oriented toward determinable “maxims.” Only then will an order be called “valid” if the orientation toward these maxims occurs, among other reasons, also because it is in some appreciable way regarded by the actor as in some way obligatory or exemplary for him. Naturally, in concrete cases, the orientation of action to an order involves a wide variety of motives. But the circumstance that, along with the other sources of conformity, the order is also held by at least part of the actors to define a model or to be binding, naturally increases the probability that action will in fact conform to it, often to a very considerable degree. An order which is adhered to from motives of pure expediency is generally much less stable than one upheld on a purely customary basis through the fact that the corresponding behavior has become habitual. The latter is much the most common type of subjective attitude. But even this type of order is in turn much less stable than an order which enjoys the prestige of being considered binding, or, as it may be expressed, of “legitimacy.” The transitions between orientation to an order from motives of tradition or of expediency to the case where a belief in its legitimacy is involved are empirically gradual.
3. It is possible for action to be oriented to an order in other ways than through conformity with its prescriptions, as they are generally understood by the actors. Even in the case of evasion or disobedience, the probability of their being recognized as valid norms may have an effect on action. This may, in the first place, be true from the point of view of sheer expediency. A chief orients his action to the validity of the criminal law in that he acts surreptitiously. The fact that the order is recognized as valid in his society is made evident by the fact that he cannot violate it openly without punishment. But apart from this limiting case, it is very common for violation of an order to be confined to more or less numerous partial deviations from it, or for the attempt to be made, with varying degrees of good faith, to justify the deviation as legitimate. Furthermore, there may exist at the same time different interpretations of the meaning of the order. In such cases, for sociological purposes, each can be said to be valid insofar as it actually determines the course of action. The fact that, in the same social group, a plurality of contradictory systems of order may all be recognized as valid, is not a source of difficulty for the sociological approach. Indeed, it is even possible for the same individual to orient his action to contradictory systems of order. This can take place not only at different times, as is an everyday occurrence, but even in the case of the same concrete act. A person who fights a duel follows the code of honor; but at the same time, insofar as he either keeps it secret or consciously gives himself up to the police, he takes account of the criminal law. To be sure, when evasion or contravention of the generally understood meaning of an order has become the rule, the order can be said to be "valid" only in a limited degree and, in the extreme case, not at all. Thus for sociological purposes there does not exist, as there does for the law, a rigid alternative between the validity and lack of validity of a given order. On the contrary, there is a gradual transition between the two extremes, and also it is possible, as it has been pointed out, for contradictory systems of order to exist at the same time. In that case each is "valid" precisely to the extent that there is a probability that action will in fact be oriented to it.

[Excursus:] Those familiar with the literature of this subject will recall the part played by the concept of "order" in the brilliant book of Rudolf Stammel, which was cited in the prefatory note, a book which, though like all his works it is very able, is nevertheless fundamentally misleading and confuses the issues in a catastrophic fashion. (The reader may compare the author's critical discussion of it, which was also cited in the same place, a discussion which, because of the author's annoyance at Stammel's confusion, was unfortunately written in somewhat too acrimonious a tone.) Stammel fails to distinguish the normative meaning of "validity" from the empirical. He further fails to recognize that social action is oriented to other things beside systems of order. Above all, however, in a way which is wholly indefensible from a logical point of view, he treats order as a "form" of social action and then attempts to bring it into a type of relation to "content," which is analogous to that of form and content in the theory of knowledge. Other errors in his argument will be left aside. But economic action, for instance, is oriented to knowledge of the relative scarcity of certain available means to want satisfaction, in relation to the actor's state of needs and to the present and probable action of others. Insofar as the latter affects the same resources. But at the same time, of course, the actor in his choice of economic procedures naturally orients himself in addition to the conventional and legal rules which he recognizes as valid, that is, of which he knows that a violation on his part would call forth a given reaction of other persons. Stammel succeeds in introducing a state of hopeless confusion into this very simple empirical situation, particularly in that he maintains that a causal relationship between an order and actual empirical action involves a contradiction in terms. It is true, of course, that there is no causal relationship between the normative validity of an order in the legal sense and any empirical process. In that context there is only the question of whether the order as correctly interpreted in the legal sense "applies" to the empirical situation. The question is whether in a normative sense it should be treated as valid and, if so, what the content of its normative prescriptions for this situation should be. But for sociological purposes, as distinguished from legal, it is only the probability of orientation to the subjective belief in the validity of an order which constitutes the valid order itself. It is undeniable that, in the ordinary sense of the word "causal," there is a causal relationship between this probability and the relevant course of economic action.

6. Types of Legitimate Order: Convention and Law

The legitimacy of an order may be guaranteed in two principal ways: 26

I. The guarantee may be purely subjective, being either
   I. affectual: resulting from emotional surrender; or
   2. value-rational: determined by the belief in the absolute validity of the order as the expression of ultimate values of an ethical, esthetic or of any other type; or
   3. religious: determined by the belief that salvation depends upon obedience to the order.

II. The legitimacy of an order may, however, be guaranteed also (or merely) by the expectation of specific external effects, that is, by interest situations.
An order will be called
(a) *convention* so far as its validity is externally guaranteed by the probability that deviation from it within a given social group will result in a relatively general and practically significant reaction of disapproval;
(b) *law* if it is externally guaranteed by the probability that physical or psychological coercion will be applied by a staff of people in order to bring about compliance or avenge violation.

(On the concept of convention see Weigelin, *op. cit.*, and F. Tönnies, *Die Sitte* [1909], besides Jhering, *op. cit.*)

1. The term convention will be employed to designate that part of the custom followed within a given social group which is recognized as "binding" and protected against violation by sanctions of disapproval. As distinguished from "law" in the sense of the present discussion, it is not enforced by a staff. Stammler distinguishes convention from law in terms of the entirely voluntary character of conformity. This is not, however, in accord with everyday usage and does not even fit the examples he gives. Conformity with convention in such matters as the usual forms of greeting, the mode of dress recognized as appropriate or respectable, and various of the rules governing the restrictions on social intercourse, both in form and in content, is very definitely expected of the individual and regarded as binding on him. It is not, as in the case of certain ways of preparing food, a mere usage, which he is free to conform to or not as he sees fit. A violation of conventional rules—such as standards of "respectability" (Standessitte)—often leads to the extremely severe and effective sanction of an informal boycott on the part of members of one's status group. This may actually be a more severe punishment than any legal penalty. The only thing lacking is a staff with the specialized function of maintaining enforcement of the order, such as judges, prosecuting attorneys, administrative officials, or sheriffs. The transition, however, is gradual. The case of conventional guarantee of an order which most closely approaches the legal is the application of a formally threatened and organized boycott. For terminological purposes, this is best considered a form of legal coercion. Conventional rules may, in addition to mere disapproval, also be upheld by other means; thus domestic authority may be employed to expel a visitor who defies convention. This fact is not, however, important in the present context. The decisive point is that the individual, by virtue of the existence of conventional disapproval, applies these sanctions, however drastic, on his own authority, not as a member of a staff endowed with a specific authority for this purpose.

2. For the purposes of this discussion the concept "law" will be made to turn on the presence of a staff engaged in enforcement, however useful it might be to define it differently for other purposes. The character of this agency naturally need not be at all similar to what is at present familiar. In particular it is not necessary that there should be any specifically "judicial" authority. The clan, as an agency of blood revenge and of the prosecution of feuds, is such an enforcing agency if there exist any sort of rules which governs its behavior in such situations. But this is on the extreme borderline of what can be called legal enforcement. As is well known, it has often been denied that international law could be called law, precisely because there is no legal authority above the state capable of enforcing it. In terms of the present terminology this would be correct, we could not call "law" a system the sanctions of which consisted wholly in expectations of disapproval and of the reprisals of injured parties, which is thus guaranteed entirely by convention and self-interest without the help of a specialized enforcement agency. But for purposes of legal terminology exactly the opposite might well be acceptable.

In any case the means of coercion are irrelevant. Even a "brotherly admonition," such as has been used in various religious sects as the first degree of mild coercion of the sinner, is "law" provided it is regulated by some order and applied by a staff. The same is to be said about the [Roman] censorial reprimand as a means to guarantee the observance of ethical duties and, even more so, about psychological coercion through ecclesiastic discipline. Hence "law" may be guaranteed by hierocratic as well as political authority, by the statutes of a voluntary association or domestic authority or through a sodality or some other association. The rules of [German students' fraternities known as] the Komment [and regulating such matters as convivial drinking or singing] are also law in our sense, just as the case of those [legally regulated but unenforceable] duties which are mentioned in Section 888, paragraph 2 of the German Code of Civil Procedure [for instance, the duty arising from an engagement to marry].

The *leges imperfectae* and the category of "natural obligations" are forms of legal terminology which express indirectly limits or conditions of the application of compulsion. In the same sense a trade practice which is compulsorily enforced is also law. See secs. 157 and 242 of the German Civil Code. On the concept of "fair practice" (gute Sitte), that is, desirable custom which is worthy of legal sanction, see Max Rümelin's essay in the *Schwäbische Heimatgabe für Theodor Härting* (1918).

3. It is not necessary for a valid order to be of a general and abstract character. The distinction between a legal norm and the judicial decision in a concrete case, for instance, has not always and everywhere been as clearly made as we have today come to expect. An "order" may thus occur simply as the order governing a single concrete situation. The details of this subject belong in the Sociology of Law. But for present purposes, unless otherwise specified, the modern distinction between a norm and a specific decision will be taken for granted.

4. A system of order which is guaranteed by external sanctions may at the same time be guaranteed by disinterested subjective attitudes.
The relations of law, convention, and "ethics" do not constitute a problem for sociology. From a sociological point of view an "ethical" standard is one to which men attribute a certain type of value and which, by virtue of this belief, they treat as a valid norm governing their action. In this sense it can be spoken of as defining what is ethically good in the same way that action which is called beautiful is measured by esthetic standards. It is possible for ethically normative beliefs of this kind to have a profound influence on action in the absence of any sort of external guarantee. This is often the case when the interests of others would be little affected by their violation.

Such ethical beliefs are also often guaranteed by religious motives, but they may at the same time, in the present terminology, be upheld to an important extent by disapproval of violations and the consequent boycott, or even legally with the corresponding sanctions of criminal or private law or of police measures. Every system of ethics which has in a sociological sense become validly established is likely to be upheld to a large extent by the probability that disapproval will result from its violation, that is, by convention. On the other hand, it is by no means necessary that all conventionally or legally guaranteed forms of order should claim the authority of ethical norms. Legal rules, much more often than conventional ones, may have been established entirely on grounds of expediency. Whether a belief in the validity of an order as such, which is current in a social group, is to be regarded as belonging to the realm of "ethics" or is a mere convention or a mere legal norm, cannot, for sociological purposes, be decided in general terms. It must be treated as relative to the conception of what values are treated as "ethical" in the social group in question.


The actors may ascribe legitimacy to a social order by virtue of:

(a) tradition: valid is that which has always been;
(b) affectual, especially emotional, faith: valid is that which is newly revealed or exemplary;
(c) value-rational faith: valid is that which has been deduced as an absolute;
(d) positive enactment which is believed to be legal.

Such legality may be treated as legitimate because:

(a) it derives from a voluntary agreement of the interested parties;
(b) it is imposed by an authority which is held to be legitimate and therefore meets with compliance.

All further details, except for a few other concepts to be defined below, belong in the Sociology of Law and the Sociology of Domination. For the present, only a few remarks are necessary.

1. The validity of a social order by virtue of the sacredness of tradition is the oldest and most universal type of legitimacy. The fear of magical evils reinforces the general psychological inhibitions against any sort of change in customary modes of action. At the same time the manifold vested interests which tend to favor conformity with an established order help to perpetuate it. (More in ch. III.)

2. Conscious departures from tradition in the establishment of a new order were originally almost entirely due to prophetic oracles or at least to pronouncements which were sanctioned as prophetic and thus were considered sacred. This was true as late as the statutes of the Greek aiasynmetai. Conformity thus depended on belief in the legitimacy of the prophet. In times of strict traditionalism a new order—one actually regarded as new—was not possible without revelation unless it was claimed that it had always been valid though not yet rightly known, or that it had been obscured for a time and was now being restored to its rightful place.

3. The purest type of legitimacy based on value-rationality is natural law. The influence of its logically deduced propositions upon actual conduct has lagged far behind its ideal claims; that they have had some influence cannot be denied, however. Its propositions must be distinguished from those of revealed, enacted, and traditional law.

4. Today the most common form of legitimacy is the belief in legality, the compliance with enactments which are formally correct and which have been made in the accustomed manner. In this respect, the distinction between an order derived from voluntary agreement and one which has been imposed is only relative. For so far as the agreement underlying the order is not unanimous, as in the past has often been held necessary for complete legitimacy, the order is actually imposed upon the minority; in this frequent case the order in a given group depends upon the acquiescence of those who hold different opinions. On the other hand, it is very common for minorities, by force or by the use of more ruthless and far-sighted methods, to impose an order which in the course of time comes to be regarded as legitimate by those who originally resisted it. Insofar as the ballot is used as a legal means of altering an order, it is very common for the will of a minority to attain a formal majority and for the majority to submit. In this case majority rule is a mere illusion. The belief in the legality of an order as established by voluntary agreement is relatively ancient and is occasionally found among so-called primitive people; but in these cases it is almost always supplemented by the authority of oracles.

5. So far as it is not derived merely from fear or from motives of expediency, a willingness to submit to an order imposed by one man or a small group, always implies a belief in the legitimate authority (Herrschaftsgewalt) of the source imposing it. This subject will be dealt with separately below: see sections 13 and 16 and ch. III.

6. Submission to an order is almost always determined by a variety of interests and by a mixture of adherence to tradition and belief in
legality, unless it is a case of entirely new regulations. In a very large proportion of cases, the actors subject to the order are of course not even aware how far it is a matter of custom, of convention, or of law. In such cases the sociologist must attempt to formulate the typical basis of validity.

8. Conflict, Competition, Selection

A social relationship will be referred to as "conflict" (Kampf) insofar as action is oriented intentionally to carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of the other party or parties. The term "peaceful" conflict will be applied to cases in which actual physical violence is not employed. A peaceful conflict is "competition" insofar as it consists in a formally peaceful attempt to attain control over opportunities and advantages which are also desired by others. A competitive process is "regulated" competition to the extent that its ends and means are oriented to an order. The struggle, often latent, which takes place between human individuals or social types, for advantages and for survival, but without a meaningful mutual orientation in terms of conflict, will be called "selection." Insofar as it is a matter of the relative opportunities of individuals during their own lifetime, it is "social selection"; insofar as it concerns differential chances for the survival of hereditary characteristics, "biological selection."

1. There are all manner of continuous transitions ranging from the bloody type of conflict which, setting aside all rules, aims at the destruction of the adversary, to the case of the battles of medieval chivalry, bound as they were to the strictest conventions, and to the strict regulations imposed on sport by the rules of the game. A classic example of conventional regulation in war is the herald's call before the battle of Fontenoy: "Messieurs les Anglais, tirez les premiers." There are transitions such as that from unregulated competition of, let us say, suitors for the favor of a woman to the competition for economic advantages in exchange relationships, bound as that is by the order governing the market, or to strictly regulated competitions for artistic awards or, finally, to the struggle for victory in election campaigns. The conceptual separation of peaceful [from violent] conflict is justified by the quality of the means normal to it and the peculiar sociological consequences of its occurrence (see ch. II and later).

2. All typical struggles and modes of competition which take place on a large scale will lead, in the long run, despite the decisive importance in many individual cases of accidental factors and luck, to a selection of those who have in the higher degree, on the average, possessed the personal qualities important to success. What qualities are

important depends on the conditions in which the conflict or competition takes place. It may be a matter of physical strength or of unscrupulous cunning, of the level of mental ability or mere lung power and skill in the technique of demagoguery, of loyalty to superiors or of ability to flatter the masses, of creative originality, or of adaptability, of qualities which are unusual, or of those which are possessed by the mediocre majority. Among the decisive conditions, it must not be forgotten, belong the systems of order to which the behavior of the parties is oriented, whether traditionally, as a matter of rationally disinterested loyalty (wertiational), or of expediency. Each type of order influences opportunities in the process of social selection differently.

Not every process of social selection is, in the present sense, a case of conflict. Social selection, on the contrary, means only in the first instance that certain types of behavior, and possibly of the corresponding personal qualities, lead more easily to success in the role of "lover," "husband," "member of parliament," "official," "contractor," "managing director," "successful businessman," and so on. But the concept does not specify whether this differential advantage in selection for social success is brought to bear through conflict or not, neither does it specify whether the biological chances of survival of the type are affected one way or the other.

It is only where there is a genuine competitive process that the term conflict will be used [i.e., where regulation is, in principle, possible]. It is only in the sense of "selection" that it seems, according to our experience, that conflict is empirically inevitable, and it is furthermore only in the sense of biological selection that it is inevitable in principle. Selection is inevitable because apparently no way can be worked out of eliminating it completely. Even the most strictly pacific order can eliminate means of conflict and the objects of and impulses to conflict only partially. Other modes of conflict would come to the fore, possibly in processes of open competition. But even on the utopian assumption that all competition were completely eliminated, conditions would still lead to a latent process of selection, biological or social, which would favor the types best adapted to the conditions, whether their relevant qualities were mainly determined by heredity or by environment. On an empirical level the elimination of conflict cannot go beyond a point which leaves room for some social selection, and in principle a process of biological selection necessarily remains.

3. From the struggle of individuals for personal advantages and survival, it is naturally necessary to distinguish the "conflict" and the "selection" of social relationships. It is only in a metaphorical sense that these concepts can be applied to the latter. For relationships exist only as individual actions with particular subjective meanings. Thus a process of selection or a conflict between means only that one type of action has in the course of time been displaced by another, whether it is action by the same persons or by others. This may occur in various ways. Human action may in the first place be consciously aimed to alter cer-
tain social relationships—that is, to alter the corresponding action—or it may be directed to the prevention of their development or continuance. Thus a "state" may be destroyed by war or revolution, or a conspiracy may be broken up by savage suppression; prostitution may be suppressed by police action; "usurious" business practices, by denial of legal protection or by penalties. Furthermore, social relationships may be influenced by the creation of differential advantages which favor one type over another. It is possible either for individuals or for organized groups to pursue such ends. Secondly, it may, in various ways, be an unanticipated consequence of a course of social action and its relevant conditions that certain types of social relationships (meaning, of course, the corresponding actions) will be adversely affected in their opportunities to maintain themselves or to arise. All changes of natural and social conditions have some sort of effect on the differential probabilities of survival of social relationships. Anyone is at liberty to speak in such cases of a process of "selection" of social relationships. For instance, he may say that among several states the "strongest," in the sense of the best "adapted," is victorious. It must, however, be kept in mind that this so-called "selection" has nothing to do with the selection of types of human individuals in either the social or the biological sense. In every case it is necessary to inquire into the reasons which have led to a change in the chances of survival of one or another form of social action or social relationship, which have broken up a social relationship or permitted it to continue at the expense of other competing forms. The explanation of these processes involves so many factors that it does not seem expedient to employ a single term for them. When this is done, there is always a danger of introducing uncritical value-judgments into empirical investigation. There is, above all, a danger of being primarily concerned with justifying the success of an individual case. Since individual cases are often dependent on highly exceptional circumstances, they may be in a certain sense "fortuitous." In recent years there has been more than enough of this kind of argument. The fact that a given specific social relationship has been eliminated for reasons peculiar to a particular situation, proves nothing whatever about its "fitness to survive" in general terms.

9. Communal and Associative Relationships

A social relationship will be called "communal" (Vergemeinschaftung) if and so far as the orientation of social action—whether in the individual case, on the average, or in the pure type—is based on a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together.

A social relationship will be called "associative" (Vergesellschaftung) if and insofar as the orientation of social action within it rests on a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement, whether the basis of rational judgment be absolute values or reasons of expediency. It is especially common, though by no means inevitable, for the associative type of relationship to rest on a rational agreement by mutual consent. In that case the corresponding action is, at the pole of rationality, oriented either to a value-rational belief in one's own obligation, or to a rational (zweckrational) expectation that the other party will live up to it.

This terminology is similar to the distinction made by Ferdinand Tönnies in his pioneering work, Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft; but for his purposes, Tönnies has given this distinction a rather more specific meaning than would be convenient for purposes of the present discussion.24 The purest cases of associative relationships are: (a) rational free market exchange, which constitutes a compromise of opposed but complementary interests; (b) the pure voluntary association based on self-interest (Zweckverein), a case of agreement as to a long-run course of action oriented purely to the promotion of specific ulterior interests, economic or other, of its members; (c) the voluntary association of individuals motivated by an adherence to a set of common absolute values (Gesinnungsverein), for example, the rational sect, insofar as it does not cultivate emotional and affective interests, but seeks only to serve a "cause." This last case, to be sure, seldom occurs in anything approaching the pure type.

2. Communal relationships may rest on various types of affectual, emotional, or traditional bases. Examples are a religious brotherhood, an erotic relationship, a relation of personal loyalty, a national community, the esprit de corps of a military unit. The type case is most conveniently illustrated by the family. But the great majority of social relationships has this characteristic to some degree, while being at the same time to some degree determined by associative factors. No matter how calculating and hard-headed the ruling considerations in such a social relationship—as that of a merchant to his customers—may be, it is quite possible for it to involve emotional values which transcend its utilitarian significance. Every social relationship which goes beyond the pursuit of immediate common ends, which hence lasts for long periods, involves relatively permanent social relationships between the same persons, and these cannot be exclusively confined to the technically necessary activities. Hence in such cases as association in the same military unit, in the same school class, in the same workshop or office, there is always some tendency in this direction, although the degree, to be sure, varies enormously. Conversely, a social relationship which is normally considered primarily communal may involve action on the part of some or even all of the participants which is to an important degree oriented to considerations of expediency. There is, for instance, a wide variation in the extent to which the members of a family group feel a genuine community of interests or, on the other hand, exploit the relationship for
their own ends. The concept of communal relationship has been intentionally defined in very general terms and hence includes a very heterogeneous group of phenomena. The communal type of relationship is, according to the usual interpretation of its subjective meaning, the most radical antithesis of conflict. This should not, however, be allowed to obscure the fact that coercion of all sorts is a very common thing in even the most intimate of such communal relationships if one party is weaker in character than the other. Furthermore, a process of the selection of types leading to differences in opportunity and survival, goes on within these relationships just the same as anywhere else. Associative relationships, on the other hand, very often consist only in compromises between rival interests, where only a part of the occasion or means of conflict has been eliminated, or even an attempt has been made to do so. Hence, outside the area of compromise, the conflict of interests, with its attendant competition for supremacy, remains unchanged. Conflict and communal relationships are relative concepts. Conflict varies enormously according to the means employed, especially whether they are violent or peaceful, and to the ruthlessness with which they are used. It has already been pointed out that any type of order governing social action in some way leaves room for a process of selection among various rival human types.

4. It is by no means true that the existence of common qualities, a common situation, or common modes of behavior imply the existence of a communal social relationship. Thus, for instance, the possession of a common biological inheritance by virtue of which persons are classified as belonging to the same "race," naturally implies no sort of communal social relationship between them. By restrictions on social intercourse and on marriage persons may find themselves in a similar situation, a situation of isolation from the environment which imposes these distinctions. But even if they all react to this situation in the same way, this does not constitute a communal relationship. The latter does not even exist if they have a common "feeling" about this situation and its consequences. It is only when this feeling leads to a mutual orientation of their behavior to each other that a social relationship arises between them rather than of each to the environment. Furthermore, it is only so far as this relationship involves feelings of belonging together that it is a "communal" relationship. In the case of the Jews, for instance, except for Zionist circles and the action of certain associations promoting specifically Jewish interests, there thus exist communal relationships only to a relatively small extent; indeed, Jews often repudiate the existence of a Jewish "community."

A common language, which arises from a similarity of tradition through the family and the surrounding social environment, facilitates mutual understanding, and thus the formation of all types of social relationships, in the highest degree. But taken by itself it is not sufficient to constitute a communal relationship, rather, it facilitates intercourse within the groups concerned, hence the development of associate relationships. This takes place between individuals, not because they speak the same language, but because they have other types of interests. Orientation to the rules of a common language is thus primarily important as a means of communication, not as the content of a social relationship. It is only with the emergence of a consciousness of difference from third persons who speak a different language that the fact that two persons speak the same language, and in that respect share a common situation, can lead them to a feeling of community and to modes of social organization consciously based on the sharing of the common language.

Participation in a "market" is of still another kind. It encourages association between the exchanging parties and a social relationship, above all that of competition, between the individual participants who must mutually orient their action to each other. But no further modes of association develop except in cases where certain participants enter into agreements in order to better their competitive situations, or where they all agree on rules for the purpose of regulating transactions and of securing favorable general conditions for all. (It may further be remarked that the market and the competitive economy resting on it form the most important type of the reciprocal determination of action in terms of pure self-interest, a type which is characteristic of modern economic life.)

10. Open and Closed Relationships

A social relationship, regardless of whether it is communal or associative in character, will be spoken of as "open" to outsiders if and insofar as its system of order does not deny participation to anyone who wishes to join and is actually in a position to do so. A relationship will, on the other hand, be called "closed" against outsiders so far as, according to its subjective meaning and its binding rules, participation of certain persons is excluded, limited, or subjected to conditions. Whether a relationship is open or closed may be determined traditionally, affectually, or rationally in terms of values or of expediency. It is especially likely to be closed, for rational reasons, in the following type of situation: a social relationship may provide the parties to it with opportunities for the satisfaction of spiritual or material interests, whether absolutely or instrumentally, or whether it is achieved through co-operative action or by a compromise of interests. If the participants expect that the admission of others will lead to an improvement of their situation, an improvement in degree, in kind, in the security or the value of the satisfaction, their interest will be in keeping the relationship open. If, on the other hand, their expectations are of improving their position by monopolistic tactics, their interest is in a closed relationship.
There are various ways in which it is possible for a closed social relationship to guarantee its monopolized advantages to the parties. (a) Such advantages may be left free to competitive struggle within the group; (b) they may be regulated or rationed in amount and kind, or (c) they may be appropriated by individuals or sub-groups on a permanent basis and become more or less inalienable. The last is a case of closure within, as well as against outsiders. Appropriated advantages will be called "rights." As determined by the relevant order, appropriation may be (1) for the benefit of the members of particular communal or associative groups (for instance, household groups), or (2) for the benefit of individuals. In the latter case, the individual may enjoy his rights on a purely personal basis or in such a way that in case of his death one or more other persons related to the holder of the right by birth (kinship), or by some other social relationship, may inherit the rights in question. Or the rights may pass to one or more individuals specifically designated by the holder. These are cases of hereditary appropriation. Finally, (3) it may be that the holder is more or less fully empowered to alienate his rights by voluntary agreement, either to other specific persons or to anyone he chooses. This is alienable appropriation. A party to a closed social relationship will be called a "member"; in case his participation is regulated in such a way as to guarantee him appropriated advantages, a privileged member (Rechtsgenossen). Appropriated rights which are enjoyed by individuals through inheritance or by hereditary groups, whether communal or associative, will be called the "property" of the individual or of groups in question; and, insofar as they are alienable, "free" property.

The apparently gratuitous tediousness involved in the elaborate definition of the above concepts is an example of the fact that we often neglect to think out clearly what seems to be obvious, because it is intuitively familiar.

1. (a) Examples of communal relationships, which tend to be closed on a traditional basis, are those in which membership is determined by family relationship.

(b) Personal emotional relationships are usually affectually closed. Examples are erotic relationships and, very commonly, relations of personal loyalty.

(c) Closure on the basis of value-rational commitment to values is usual in groups sharing a common system of explicit religious belief.

(d) Typical cases of rational closure on grounds of expediency are economic associations of a monopolistic or a plutocratic character.

A few examples may be taken at random. Whether a group of people engaged in conversation is open or closed depends on its content. General conversation is apt to be open, as contrasted with intimate conversation or the imparting of official information. Market relationships are in most, or at least in many, cases essentially open. In the case of many relationships, both communal and associative, there is a tendency to shift from a phase of expansion to one of exclusiveness. Examples are the guilds and the democratic city-states of Antiquity and the Middle Ages. At times these groups sought to increase their membership in the interest of improving the security of their position of power by adequate numbers. At other times they restricted their membership to protect the value of their monopolistic position. The same phenomenon is not uncommon in monastic orders and religious sects which have passed from a stage of religious proselytizing to one of restriction in the interest of the maintenance of an ethical standard or for the protection of material interests. There is a similar close relationship between the extension of market relationships in the interest of increased turnover on the one hand, their monopolistic restriction on the other. The promotion of linguistic uniformity is today a natural result of the interests of publishers and writers, as opposed to the earlier, not uncommon, tendency for status groups to maintain linguistic peculiarities or even for secret languages to emerge.

2. Both the extent and the methods of regulation and exclusion in relation to outsiders may vary widely, so that the transition from a state of openness to one of regulation and closure is gradual. Various conditions of participation may be laid down; qualifying tests, a period of probation, requirement of possession of a share which can be purchased under certain conditions, election of new members by ballot, membership or eligibility by birth or by virtue of achievements open to anyone. Finally, in case of closure and the appropriation of rights within the group, participation may be dependent on the acquisition of an appropriated right. There is a wide variety of different degrees of closure and of conditions of participation. Thus regulation and closure are relative concepts. There are all manner of gradual shadings as between an exclusive club, a theatrical audience the members of which have purchased tickets, and a party rally to which the largest possible number has been urged to come; similarly, from a church service open to the general public through the rituals of a limited sect to the mysteries of a secret cult.

3. Similarly, closure within the group may also assume the most varied forms. Thus a caste, a guild, or a group of stock exchange brokers, which is closed to outsiders, may allow to its members a perfectly free competition for all the advantages which the group as a whole monopolizes for itself. Or it may assign every member strictly to the enjoyment of certain advantages, such as claims over customers or particular business opportunities, for life or even on a hereditary basis. This is particularly characteristic of India. Similarly, a closed group of settlers (Markgenossenschaft) may allow its members free use of the resources of its area or may restrict them rigidly to a plot assigned to each individual household. A closed group of colonists may allow free use of the land or sanction and guarantee permanent appropriation of
separate holdings. In such cases all conceivable transitional and intermediate forms can be found. Historically, the closure of eligibility to seips, beneficiaries, and offices within the group, and the appropriation on the part of those enjoying them, have occurred in the most varied forms. Similarly, the establishment of rights to and possession of particular jobs on the part of workers may develop all the way from the "closed shop" to a right to a particular job. The first step in this development may be to prohibit the dismissal of a worker without the consent of the workers' representatives. The development of the "works councils" in Germany after 1918 might be a first step in this direction, though it need not be. 

All the details must be reserved for the later analysis. The most extreme form of permanent appropriation is found in cases where particular rights are guaranteed to an individual or to certain groups of them, such as households, clans, families, in such a way that it is specified in the order either that, in case of death, the rights descend to specific heirs, or that the possessor is free to transfer them to any other person at will. Such a person thereby becomes a party to the social relationship so that, when appropriation has reached this extreme within the group, it becomes to that extent an open group in relation to outsiders. This is true so long as acquisition of membership is not subject to the ratification of the other, prior members.

4. The principal motives for closure of a relationship are: (a) The maintenance of quality, which is often combined with the interest in prestige and the consequent opportunities to enjoy honor, and even profit; examples are communities of ascetics, monastic orders, especially, for instance, the Indian mendicant orders, religious sects like the Puritans, organized groups of warriors, of ministeriales and other functionaries, organized citizen bodies as in the Greek states, craft guilds; (b) the contraction of advantages in relation to consumption needs (Nahrungsspielraum); examples are monopolies of consumption, the most developed form of which is a self-subsistence village community; (c) the growing scarcity of opportunities for acquisition (Erwerbsspielraum). This is found in trade monopolies such as guilds, the ancient monopolies of fishing rights, and so on. Usually motive (a) is combined with (b) or (c).

11. The Imputation of Social Action: Representation and Mutual Responsibility

Within a social relationship, whether it is traditional or enacted, certain kinds of action of each participant may be imputed to all others, in which case we speak of "mutually responsible members"; or the action of certain members (the "representatives") may be attributed to the others (the "represented"). In both cases, the members will share the resulting advantages as well as the disadvantages.

In accordance with the prevailing order, the power of representation may be (a) completely appropriated in all its forms—the case of self-appointed authority (Eigenvollmacht); (b) conferred in accordance with particular characteristics, permanently or for a limited term; (c) conferred by specific acts of the members or of outside persons, again permanently or for a limited term—the cases of "derived" or "delegated" powers.

There are many different conditions which determine the ways in which social relationships, communal or associative, develop relations of mutual responsibility or of representation. In general terms, it is possible only to say that one of the most decisive is the extent to which the action of the group is oriented to violent conflict or to peaceful exchange as its end. Besides these, many special circumstances, which can only be discussed in the detailed analysis, may be of crucial importance. It is not surprising that this development is least conspicuous in groups which pursue purely ideal ends by peaceful means. Often the degree of closure against outsiders is closely related to the development of mutual responsibility or of representation. But this is by no means always the case.

1. Imputation may in practice involve both active and passive mutual responsibility. All participants may be held responsible for the action of any one just as he himself is, and similarly may be entitled to enjoy any benefits resulting from this action. This responsibility may be owed to spirits or gods, that is, involve a religious orientation; or it may be responsibility to other human beings, as regulated by convention or by law. Examples of regulation by convention are blood revenge carried out against or with the help of members of the kin group, and reprisals against the inhabitants of the town or the country of the offender, of the legal type, formal punishment of relatives and members of the household or community, and personal liability of members of a household or of a commercial partnership for each other's debts. Mutual responsibility in relation to gods has also had very significant historical results. For instance, in the covenant of Israel with Jahweh, in early Christianity, and in the early Puritan community.

On the other hand, the imputation may mean no more than that the participants in a closed social relationship, by virtue of the traditional or legal order, accept as legally binding a representative's decisions, especially over economic resources. (Examples are the "validity" of decisions by the executive committee of a voluntary association or by the responsible agent of a political or economic organization over resources which, as specified in the statutes, are meant to serve the group's purposes.)

2. Mutual responsibility is typically found in the following cases: (a) In traditional, communal groups based on birth or the sharing of a
common life; for example, the household and the kinship unit; (b) in closed relationships which maintain by force a monopolized position and control over the corresponding benefits; (c) the political association, especially in the past, but also today, most strikingly in time of war; (d) in profit-oriented enterprises whose participants personally conduct the business; the typical case is the business partnership; (e) in some cases, in labor associations; e.g., the [Russian] arteł.

Representation is most frequently found in associations devoted to specific purposes and in legally organized groups, especially when funds have been collected and must be administered in the interests of the group. This will be further discussed in the Sociology of Law.

3. The power of representation is conferred according to characteristics when it goes by seniority or some other such rule.

4. It is not possible to carry the analysis of this subject further in general terms; its elaboration must be reserved to the detailed investigation. The most ancient and most universal phenomenon in this field is that of reprisal, meant either as revenge or as a means of gaining control of hostages, or some other kind of security against future injury.

12. The Organization

A social relationship which is either closed or limits the admission of outsiders will be called an organization (Verband) when its regulations are enforced by specific individuals: a chief and, possibly, an administrative staff, which normally also has representative powers. The incumbency of a policy-making position or participation in the functions of the staff constitute "executive powers" (Regierungsgewalten). These may be appropriated, or they may be assigned, in accordance with the regulations of the organization, to specific persons or to individuals selected on the basis of specific characteristics or procedures. "Organized action" is (a) either the staff’s action, which is legitimated by its executive or representative powers and oriented to realizing the organization’s order, or (b) the members’ action as directed by the staff.27

1. It is terminologically indifferent whether the relationship is of a communal or associative character. It is sufficient for there to be a person or persons in authority—the head of a family, the executive committee of an association, a managing director, a prince, a president, the head of a church—whose action is concerned with carrying into effect the order governing the organization. This criterion is decisive because it is not merely a matter of action which is oriented to an order, but which is specifically directed to its enforcement. Sociologically, this adds to the concept of a closed social relationship a further element, which is of far-reaching empirical importance. For no means every closed communal or associative relationship is an organization. For instance, this is not true of an erotic relationship or of a kinship group without a head.

2. Whether or not an organization exists is entirely a matter of the presence of a person in authority, with or without an administrative staff. More precisely, it exists so far as there is a probability that certain persons will act in such a way as to carry out the order governing the organization; that is, that persons are present who can be counted on to act in this way whenever the occasion arises. For purposes of definition, it is indifferent what is the basis of the relevant expectation, whether it is a case of traditional, affectual or value-rational devotion (such as feudal fealty, loyalty to an officer or to a service). It may, on the other hand, be a matter of expediency, as, for instance, a pecuniary interest in the attached salary. Thus, for our purposes, the organization does not exist apart from the probability that a course of action oriented in this way will take place. If there is no probability of this type of action on the part of a particular group of persons or of a given individual, there is in these terms only a social relationship. On the other hand, so long as there is a probability of such action, the organization as a sociological phenomenon continues to exist, in spite of the fact that the specific individuals whose action is oriented to the order in question, may have been completely changed. The concept has been defined intentionally to include precisely this phenomenon.

3. It is possible (a) that, in addition to the action of the administrative staff itself or that which takes place under its direction, there may be other cases where action of the participants is intended to uphold the authority of the order; for instance, contributions or "liturgies," that is, certain types of personal services, such as jury service or military service. It is also possible (b) for the order to include norms to which it is expected that the action of the members of an organization will be oriented in respects other than those pertaining to the affairs of the organization as a unit. For instance, the law of the state includes rules governing private economic relations which are not concerned with the enforcement of the state’s legal order as such, but with action in the service of private interests. This is true in most of the "civil" law. In the first case (a) one may speak of action oriented to organizational affairs (verbandsbezogenes Handeln); in the second (b) of action subject to the organization’s regulation (verbandsgeregeltes Handeln). It is only in the cases of the action of the administrative staff itself and of that deliberately directed by it that the term "organized action" (Verbandshandeln) will be used. Examples of such action would be participation in any capacity in a war fought by a state, or a motion which is passed by the members at the behest of its executive committee, or a contract entered into by the person in authority, the validity of which is imposed on all members and for which they are held responsible (cf. section 11). Further, all administration of justice and administrative procedure belongs in this category (cf. section 14).

An organization may be (a) autonomous or heteronomous, (b) autocephalous or heterocephalous. Autonomy means that the order governing
the organization has been established by its own members on their own authority, regardless of how this has taken place in other respects. In the case of heteronomy, it has been imposed by an outside agency. Autoccephaly means that the chief and his staff are selected according to the autonomous order of the organization itself, not, as in the case of heteroccephaly, that they are appointed by outsiders. Again, this is regardless of any other aspects of the relationship.

A case of heteroccephaly is the appointment of the governors of the Canadian provinces by the central government of the Dominion. It is possible for a heteroccephalous group to be autonomous and an autoccephalous group to be heteronomous. It is also possible in both respects for an organization to have both characters at the same time in different spheres. The member-states of the German Empire, a federal state, were autoccephalous. But in spite of this, within the sphere of authority of the Reich, they were heteronomous; whereas, within their own sphere, in such matters as religion and education, they were autonomous. Alsace-Lorraine was, under German jurisdiction, in a limited degree autonomous, but at the same time heteroccephalous in that the governor was appointed by the Kaiser. All those elements may be present in the same situation to some degree. An organization which is at the same time completely heteronomous and completely heteroccephalous is usually best treated as a “part” of the more extensive group, as would ordinarily be done with a “regiment” as part of an army. But whether this is the case depends on the actual extent of independence in the orientation of action in the particular case. For terminological purposes, it is entirely a question of convenience.

13. Consensual and Imposed Order in Organizations

An association’s enacted order may be established in one of two ways: by voluntary agreement, or by being imposed and acquiesced in. The leadership in an organization may claim a legitimate right to impose new rules. The “constitution” of an organization is the empirically existing porbability, varying in extent, kind and conditions, that rules imposed by the leadership will be acceded to. The existing rules may specify that certain groups or sections of the members must consent, or at least have been heard. Besides this, there may be any number of other conditions.

An organization’s order may be imposed not only on its members but also on certain non-members. This is especially true of persons who are linked to a given territorial area by virtue of residence, birth, or the performance of certain actions. In this case the order possesses “territorial validity” (Gebietsgeltung). An organization which imposes its order in principle on a territory will be called a “territorial organization” (Gebiets-

verband). This usage will be employed regardless of how far the claim to the validity of its order over its own members is also confined to matters pertaining to the area. (Such a limitation is possible** and indeed occurs to some extent.)

1. In our terminology, an order is always “imposed” to the extent that it does not originate from a voluntary personal agreement of all the individuals concerned. The concept of imposition hence includes “majority rule,” in that the minority must submit. For that reason there have been long periods when the legitimacy of majority rule has either not been recognized at all, or been held doubtful. This was true in the case of the Estates of the Middle Ages, and in very recent times, in the Russianobschina. (This will be further discussed in the Sociology of Law and of Domination.)

2. Even in cases where there is formally voluntary agreement, it is very common, as is generally known, for there to be a large measure of imposition. (This is true of theobschina.) In that case, it is the actual state of affairs which is decisive for sociological purposes.

3. The concept of constitution made use of here is that also used by Lassalle. It is not the same as what is meant by a “written” constitution, or indeed by “constitution” in any sort of legal meaning. The only relevant question for sociological purposes is when, for what purposes, and within what limits, or possibly under what special conditions (such as the approval of gods or priests or the consent of electors), the members of the organization will submit to the leadership. Furthermore, under what circumstances the administrative staff and the organized actions of the group will be at the leadership’s disposal when it issues orders, in particular, new rules.

4. The major cases of the territorial imposition of an order are criminal law and various other legal rules the applicability of which depends on whether the actor was resident, born, performed or completed the action within the area controlled by a political organization. (Compare the concept of the “territorial corporate organization”—Gebietssowschaft—as used by Gierke and Preuss.)

14. Administrative and Regulative Order

Rules which govern organized action constitute an administrative order (Verwaltungsordnung). Rules which govern other kinds of social action and thereby protect the actors’ enjoyment of the resulting benefits will be called a regulative order (Regulierungsordnung). So far as an organization is solely oriented to the first type, it will be called an administrative organization; so far as it is oriented to the second type, a regulative organization.
1. It goes without saying that the majority of actual organizations partake of both characteristics. An example of a merely regulative organization would be a theoretically conceivable state based purely on the upholding of public order (Rechtsstaat) and committed to absolute laissez-faire. (This would imply that even the control of the monetary system was left to private enterprise.)

2. On the concept of organized action see above, sec. 12:3. Under the concept of administrative order would be included all the rules which govern not only the action of the administrative staff, but also that of the members in their direct relation to the organization; hence these rules pertain to those goals the pursuit of which the administrative order seeks to facilitate through prescribed and coordinated action on the part of the administrative staff and the members. In a completely communist economy almost all social action would be of this character. In an absolute laissez-faire state (Rechtsstaat) only the functions of judges, police authorities, jurors and soldiers, and activity as legislator and voter would be included. The distinction between administrative and regulative order coincides in its broad lines, though not always in detail, with the distinction between public and private law. (All further details are treated in the Sociology of Law.)

15. Enterprise, Formal Organization, Voluntary and Compulsory Association

Continuous rational activity of a specified kind will be called an enterprise; an association with a continuously and rationally operating staff will be called a formal organization.

An organization which claims authority only over voluntary members will be called a voluntary association (Verein); an organization which imposes, within a specifiable sphere of operations, its order (with relative success) on all action conforming with certain criteria will be called a compulsory organization or association (Anstalt).

1. The concept of the enterprise covers business conducted by political and ecclesiastic organizations as well as by voluntary associations insofar as it has rational continuity.

2. Voluntary as well as compulsory associations are organizations with rationally established rules. More correctly, insofar as an organization has rationally established rules, it is either a voluntary or a compulsory association. Compulsory organizations are, above all, the state with its subsidiary heterocephalous organizations, and the church insofar as its order is rationally established. The order governing a compulsory association claims to be binding on all persons to whom the particular relevant criteria apply—such as birth, residence, or the use of certain facilities. It makes no difference whether the individual joined volun-

tarily; nor does it matter whether he has taken any part in establishing the order. It is thus a case of imposed order in the most definite sense. Compulsory associations are frequently territorial organizations.

3. The distinction between voluntary and compulsory associations is relative in its empirical application. The rules of a voluntary association may affect the interests of non-members, and recognition of the validity of these rules may be imposed upon them by usurpation and the exercise of naked power, but also by legal regulation, as in the case of the law governing corporate securities.

4. It is hardly necessary to emphasize that the concepts of voluntary and compulsory associations are by no means exhaustive of all conceivable types of organizations. Furthermore, they are to be thought of as polar types, as are sect and church in the religious sphere.

16. Power and Domination

A. “Power” (Macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.

B. “Domination” (Herrschaft)\(^31\) is the probability that a command with a given specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons. “Discipline” is the probability that by virtue of habituation a command will receive prompt and automatic obedience in stereotyped forms, on the part of a given group of persons.\(^32\)

1. The concept of power is sociologically amorphous. All conceivable qualities of a person and all conceivable combinations of circumstances may put him in a position to impose his will in a given situation. The sociological concept of domination must hence be more precise and can only mean the probability that a command will be obeyed.

2. The concept of discipline includes the habituation characteristic of uncritical and unresisting mass obedience.

C. The existence of domination turns only on the actual presence of one person successfully issuing orders to others; it does not necessarily imply either the existence of an administrative staff or, for that matter, of an organization. It is, however, uncommon to find it unrelated to at least one of these. A “ruling organization” (Herrschaftsverband) exists insofar as its members are subject to domination by virtue of the established order.

1. The head of a household rules without an administrative staff. A Bedouin chief, who levies contributions from the caravans, persons and shipments which pass his stronghold, controls this group of changing individuals, who do not belong to the same organization, as soon and as
long as they face the same situation; but to do this, he needs a following which, on the appropriate occasions, serves as his administrative staff in exercising the necessary compulsion. (However, it is theoretically conceivable that this type of control is exercised by a single individual.)

2. If it possesses an administrative staff, an organization is always to some degree based on domination. But the concept is relative. In general, an effectively ruling organization is also an administrative one. The character of the organization is determined by a variety of factors: the mode in which the administration is carried out, the character of the personnel, the objects over which it exercises control, and the extent of effective jurisdiction. The first two factors in particular are dependent in the highest degree on the way in which domination is legitimized (see ch. III).

17. Political and Hierocratic Organizations

A “ruling organization” will be called “political” insofar as its existence and order is continuously safeguarded within a given territorial area by the threat and application of physical force on the part of the administrative staff. A compulsory political organization with continuous operations (politischer Anstandsbetrieb) will be called a “state” insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its order. Social action, especially organized action, will be spoken of as “politically oriented” if it aims at exerting influence on the government of a political organization; especially at the appropriation, expropriation, redistribution or allocation of the powers of government.

A “hierocratic organization” is an organization which enforces its order through psychic coercion by distributing or denying religious benefits (“hierocratic coercion”). A compulsory hierocratic organization will be called a “church” insofar as its administrative staff claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of hierocratic coercion.

1. It goes without saying that the use of physical force (Gewaltsmacht) is neither the sole, nor even the most usual, method of administration of political organizations. On the contrary, their heads have employed all conceivable means to bring about their ends. But, at the same time, the threat of force, and in the case of need its actual use, is the method which is specific to political organizations and is always the last resort when others have failed. Conversely, physical force is by no means limited to political groups even as a legitimate method of enforcement.

It has been freely used by kinship groups, household groups, consociations and, in the Middle Ages, under certain circumstances by all those entitled to bear arms. In addition to the fact that it uses, among other means, physical force to enforce its system of order, the political organization is further characterized by the fact that the authority of its administrative staff is claimed as binding within a territorial area and this claim is upheld by force. Whenever organizations which make use of force are also characterized by the claim to territorial jurisdiction, such as village communities or even some household groups, federations of guilds or of workers’ associations (“soviet”), they are by definition to that extent political organizations.

2. It is not possible to define a political organization, including the state, in terms of the end to which its action is devoted. All the way from provision for subsistence to the patronage of art, there is no conceivable end which some political association has not at some time pursued. And from the protection of personal security to the administration of justice, there is none which all have recognized. Thus it is possible to define the “political” character of an organization only in terms of the means peculiar to it, the use of force. This means is, however, in the above sense specific, and is indispensable to its character. It is even, under certain circumstances, elevated into an end in itself.

This usage does not exactly conform to everyday speech. But the latter is too inconsistent to be used for technical purposes. We speak of the foreign currency policy of a central bank, the financial policy of an association, or the educational policy of a local authority, and mean the systematic treatment and conduct of particular affairs. It comes considerably closer to the present meaning when we distinguish the “political” aspect or implication of a question. Thus there is the “political” official, the “political” newspaper, the “political” revolution, the “political” club, the “political” party, and the “political” consequences of an action, as distinguished from others such as the economic, cultural, or religious aspect of the persons, affairs or processes in question. In this usage we generally mean by “political,” things that have to do with relations of authority within what is, in the present terminology, a political organization, the state. The reference is to things which are likely to uphold, to change or overthrow, to hinder or promote, these authority relations as distinguished from persons, things, and processes which have nothing to do with it. This usage thus seeks to bring out the common features of domination, the way it is exercised by the state, irrespective of the ends involved. Hence it is legitimate to claim that the definition put forward here is only a more precise formulation of what is meant in everyday usage in that it gives sharp emphasis to what is most characteristic of this means: the actual or threatened use of force. It is, of course, true that everyday usage applies the term “political,” not only to groups which are the direct agents of the legitimate use of force itself, but also to other, often wholly peaceful groups, which attempt to influence the activities of the political organization. It seems best for present purposes to distinguish this type of social action, “politically oriented” action, from political action as such, the actual organized action of political groups.
3. Since the concept of the state has only in modern times reached its full development, it is best to define it in terms appropriate to the modern type of state, but at the same time, in terms which abstract from the values of the present day, since these are particularly subject to change. The primary formal characteristics of the modern state are as follows: It possesses an administrative and legal order subject to change by legislation, to which the organized activities of the administrative staff, which are also controlled by regulations, are oriented. This system of order claims binding authority, not only over the members of the state, the citizens, most of whom have obtained membership by birth, but also to a very large extent over all action taking place in the area of its jurisdiction. It is thus a compulsory organization with a territorial basis. Furthermore, today, the use of force is regarded as legitimate only so far as it is either permitted by the state or prescribed by it. Thus the right of a father to discipline his children is recognized—a survival of the former independent authority of the head of a household, which in the right to use force has sometimes extended to a power of life and death over children and slaves. The claim of the modern state to monopolize the use of force is as essential to it as its character of compulsory jurisdiction and of continuous operation.

4. In formulating the concept of a hierocratic organization, it is not possible to use the character of the religious benefits it offers, whether worldly or other-worldly, material or spiritual, as the decisive criterion. What is important is rather the fact that its control over these values can form the basis of a system of spiritual domination over human beings. What is most characteristic of the church, even in the common usage of the term, is the fact that it is a rational, compulsory association with continuous operation and that it claims a monopolistic authority. It is normal for a church to strive for complete control on a territorial basis and to attempt to set up the corresponding territorial or parochial organization. So far as this takes place, the means by which this claim to monopoly is upheld will vary from case to case. But historically, its control over territorial areas has not been nearly so essential to the church as to political associations; and this is particularly true today. It is its character as a compulsory association, particularly the fact that one becomes a member of the church by birth, which distinguishes the church from a "sect." It is characteristic of the latter that it is a voluntary association and admits only persons with specific religious qualifications. (This subject will be further discussed in the Sociology of Religion.)

NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all notes in this chapter are by Talcott Parsons. For Parsons' exposition and critique of Weber's methodology, see his introduction to The Theory of Social and Economic Organization and his Structure of Social Action.
10. The above passage is an exceedingly compact statement of Weber's theory of the logical conditions of proof of causal relationship. He developed this most fully in his essay on "Objectivity in Social Science . . ." op. cit. It is also discussed in other parts of GaW. The best and fullest secondary discussion is to be found in Schelling's book, Max Weber's Wissenschaftslehre. There is a brief discussion in Parsons' Structure of Social Action, ch. 16.


12. The expression *sinnhafte Adäquanz* is one of the most difficult of Weber's technical terms to translate. In most places the cumbersome phrase "adequacy on the level of meaning" has had to be employed. It should be clear from the progress of the discussion that what Weber refers to is a satisfying level of knowledge for the particular purposes of the subjective state of mind of the actor or actors. He is, however, careful to point out that *causal* adequacy involves in addition to this a satisfactory correspondence between the results of observations from the subjective point of view and from the objective; that is, observations of the overt course of action which can be described without reference to the state of mind of the actor. For a discussion of the methodological problem involved here, see Structure of Social Action, chps. II and V.

13. This is the first occurrence in Weber's text of the term *Chance* which he uses very frequently. It is here translated by "probability," because he uses it as interchangeable with *Wahrscheinlichkeit*. As the term "probability" is used in a technical mathematical and statistical sense, however, it implies the possibility of numerical statement. In most of the cases where Weber uses *Chance* this is out of the question. It is, however, possible to speak in terms of higher and lower degrees of probability. To avoid confusion with the technical mathematical concept, the term "likelihood" will often be used in the translation. It is by means of this concept that Weber, in a highly ingenious way, has bridged the gap between the interpretation of meaning and the inevitably more complex facts of overt action.

14. The term "reification" as used by Professor Morris Cohen in his book, *Reason and Nature*, seems to fit Weber's meaning exactly. A concept or system of concepts, which critical analysis can show to be abstract, is "reified" when it is used naively as though it provided an adequate total description of the concrete phenomenon in question. The fallacy of "reification" is virtually another name for what Professor Whitehead has called the "fallacy of misplaced concreteness." See his *Science and the Modern World.*

15. See August Weismann, *Die Allmacht der Naturzüchtung* (Jena: Fischer, 1893); his opponent was probably Alexander Götze (1849-1923), author of *Lehrbuch der Zoologie* (Leipzig: Engelmann, 1902) and of *Tierkunde* (Strasbourg: Trübner, 1904). (R)

16. In the above classification as well as in some of those which follow, the terminology is not standardized either in German or in English. Hence, just as there is a certain arbitrariness in Weber's definitions, the same is true of any corresponding set of definitions in English. It should be kept in mind that all of them are modes of orientation of action to patterns which contain a normative element. "Usage" has seemed to be the most appropriate translation of *Bruch* since, according to Weber's own definition, the principal criterion is that "it is done to conform with the pattern." The term would also seem to be good precedent for the translation of *Stitze* by "custom." The contrast with fashion, which Weber takes up in his first comment, is essentially the same in both languages. The term *Interessenlage* presents greater difficulty. It involves
two components: the motivation in terms of self-interest and orientation to the opportunities presented by the situation. It has not seemed possible to use any single term to convey this meaning in English and hence, a more roundabout expression has had to be resorted to.

17. The term "convention" in Weber's usage is narrower than Brauch. The difference consists in the fact that a normative pattern to which action is oriented is conventional only insofar as it is regarded as part of a legitimate order, whereas the question of moral obligation to conformity which legitimacy implies is not involved in "usage." The distinction is closely related to that of W. G. Sumner between "mores" and "folkways." It has seemed best to retain the English term closest to Weber's own.

18. It is, in a sense, the empirical reference of this statement which constitutes the central theme of Weber's series of studies in the Sociology of Religion. Insofar as he finds it possible to attribute importance to "ideas" in the determination of action, the most important differences between systems of ideas are not so much those in the degree of rationalization as in the direction which the process of rationalization in each case has taken. This series of studies was left uncompleted at his death, but all the material which was in a condition fit for publication has been assembled in the three volumes of the Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie (GAARS).

19. It has not been possible to identify this reference of Weber's. It refers most probably to a projected conclusion which was never written.

20. The reader may readily become confused as to the basis of the following classification, as compared with that presented in sec. 7. The first classification is one of motives for maintaining a legitimate order in force, whereas the second is one of motives for attributing legitimacy to the order. This explains the inclusion of self-interested motives in the first classification, but not in the second. It is quite possible, for instance, for unreligious persons to support the doctrine of the divine right of kings, because they feel that the breakdown of an order which depends on this would have undesirable consequences. This is not, however, a possible motive on which to base a direct sense of personal moral obligation to conform with the order.

21. Rheinstein's emendation, see his edition, op. cit., p. (R)

22. In 1745, Maurice de Saxe defeated the British under the Duke of Cumberland even though he sustained heavy losses in the one-sided opening round. (R)

23. A cautionary note is in order here: The definitions of conflict or struggle (Kampf) and of power (section 16) have often been wrecked out of context in discussions of Weber as a "power politician." The present section, however, defines the varieties of conflict, from the extreme case of violent, unlimited and unregulated struggle to peaceful and regulated competition. In fact, mere conflict and power are not Weber's major concern, which is rather with variously regulated and legitimated actions and their group context. (R)

24. As Weber goes on to explain, he uses Vergeleichtschaftung and Vergeleichtschaft in a continuous rather than a dichotomous sense, and thus maintains his critical distance from Tönnies' paired contrast of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft. Similarly, Weber rejected Gierke's invidious contrast between "cold-blooded" Roman law and "communal" Germanic law, even though he started his career as a Germanist rather than a Romanist. (R)

25. This is a reference to the Betriebsräte which were formed in German industrial plants during the Revolution of 1918-19 and were recognized in the Weimar Constitution as entitled to representation in the Federal Economic Council. The standard work in English is W. C. Guillebaud, The Works Council, A German Experiment in Industrial Democracy (Cambridge University Press, 1928).

26. Weber’s term here is Nahrungsspielraum. The concept refers to the scope of resources and opportunities on which the standard of living of an individual or a group is dependent. By contrast with this, Erwerbspielraum is a similar scope of resources and economic opportunities seen from the point of view of their possible role as sources of profit. The basic distinction implied in this contrast is of central importance to Weber’s analysis later on (see chapter II, sec. 10ff.).

27. The term "corporate group" for Verband, as used by Parsons, is open to misunderstandings on both the common-sense and the historical level since Weber’s term includes more than either economic groups or self-governing, often professional bodies. Parsons’ alternative term, "organized group," has been retained. The term "organization" should be understood literally in the sense of a group with an "organ," but not necessarily of a rationalized kind; the latter would make it an "enterprise" or a "formal organization" (see sec. 15).—For Weber’s older definition of Verband and Verbandsanlehn see Appendix I. (R)

28. The concept “objective possibility” (objektive Möglichkeit) plays an important technical role in Weber’s methodological studies. According to his usage, a thing is “objectively possible” if it “makes sense” to conceive it as an empirically existing entity. It is a question of conforming to, as well as being, the formal, logical conditions. The question whether a phenomenon which is in such sense “objectively possible” will actually be found with any significant degree of probability or approximation, is a logically distinct question.

29. See Ferdinand Lassalle, “Über Verfassungswesen” (1862), in Gesammelte Reden und Schriften, Eduard Bernstein, ed. (Berlin: Cassirer, 1919), 7-62. (R)

30. See Otto Gierke, Geschichte des deutschen Körperschafts begriffs (Berlin: Weidmann, 1873), 829; Hugo Preuss, Gemeinde, Staat, Reich als Gesteitskörperschaft (1889). Preuss, one of Gierke’s pupils, exerted decisive influence on the making of the Weimar constitution, to which Weber also contributed at about the same time that he worked intermittently on these definitions. (W and R)

31. In his translation Parsons pointed out that “the term Herrschaft has no satisfactory English equivalent. The term "imperative control," however, as used by N. S. Timasheff in his Introduction to the Sociology of Law is close to Weber’s meaning” (Parsons, ed., op. cit., p. 83). Therefore, he borrowed this term for "the most general purposes." At a later time, Parsons indicated that he now preferred the term “leadership.” For more specific purposes, however, he used the term “authority.” In objecting to “domination” (as used by Bendix and Rheinstein/Shils) Parsons noted: “It is true to be sure that the term Herrschaft, which in its most general meaning I should now translate as "leadership," implies that a leader has power over his followers. But "domination" suggests that this fact, rather than the integration of the collectivity, in the interest of effective functioning (especially the integration of the crucial Verband or corporate group), is the critical factor from Weber’s point of view. I do not believe that the former interpretation represents the main trend of Weber’s thought, although he was in certain respects a "realist" in the analysis of power. The preferable interpretation, as I see it, is represented especially by his tremendous emphasis on the importance of legitimation. I should therefore wish to stick to my own decision to translate legitime Herrschaft, which for Weber was overwhelmingly the most significant case for general structural analysis, as authority.” (See T. Parsons’ review article

I prefer the term domination in this section because Weber stresses the fact of mere compliance with a command, which may be due to habit, a belief in legitimacy, or to considerations of expediency. However, Weber emphasizes here as later that, in addition to the willingness of subjects to comply with a command, there is usually a staff, which again may act on the basis of habit, legitimacy or self-interest. Sociologically, a *Herrschaft* is a structure of superordination and subordination, of leaders and led, rulers and ruled; it is based on a variety of motives and of means of enforcement. In ch. III, Weber presents a typology of legitimate *Herrschaft* where the term “authority” is indeed feasible. However, in ch. X, he deals extensively with both faces of *Herrschaft*: legitimacy and force. It should be clear to the reader that both “domination” and “authority” are “correct” although each stresses a different component of *Herrschaft*. Moreover, in Part Two a *Herrschaft* is quite specifically the medieval seigneurie or manor or similar structures in patrimonial regimes. This is also the historical derivation of the term. For a major, and sociologically valuable, study see Otto Brunner, *Land und Herrschaft: Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Oesterreichs im Mittelalter* (Vienna, 1959). (R)

32. For the earlier discussion of discipline, see Part Two, ch. XIV:iii:1, “The Meaning of Discipline.”

33. The German is *Devisenpolitik*. Translation in this context is made more difficult by the fact that the German language does not distinguish between “politics” and “policy,” *Politik* having both meanings. The remarks which Weber makes about various kinds of policy would have been unnecessary, had he written originally in English.