Analytic Social Philosophy—Basic Concepts

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In thinking of any social structure as a system of regulating and organizing people’s behaviour, we must be careful not to abstract the social system from the people who make it up. What is called ‘Society’ is not an autonomous entity to which people are subject, even if they often experience that way. On the other hand, people’s actions are not performed in a vacuum. People see each other and themselves as part of a society, as having a place in it, and as being constrained to act in certain ways because of it. Society, then, exists neither ‘out there’, like tigers or trees, nor in the privacy of people’s heads, like wishes and worries. In some sense it is intersubjective, and I should like to explain precisely how.

There would be no social system if people had nothing to do with one another, but more than that, their actions interlock and exhibit patterns in virtue of the beliefs and attitudes they share. In fact, a great part of what people know about one another is that they share a great many beliefs and attitudes. This requires a shared conceptual scheme which, besides its elaborate categorization of things in the natural world, includes a catalogue of what there is for people to be and to do. Now when we refer to social regulation and organization, we imply that the resulting patterns of behaviour are not merely statistical, meeting the expectations of detached scientific observers, but in large measure socially recognized, meeting the expectations of members of society themselves. At least in part, the system of regulation and organization that explains these patterns is internalized in people’s beliefs and attitudes, and is part of their shared conceptual scheme.

The purpose of this paper is to explicate the idea that the system of regulating and organizing people’s behaviour in a society is, in a certain precise sense, intersubjective. To this end I wish to apply analytic philosophical tools to the provocative philosophical suggestion put forth by the sociologists Klapp (1957) and Scheff (1967) that the basic concepts of sociology can be derived from the notion of consensus. In particular,
concepts of social regulation and of organization, like norms, roles, and groups, will be analysed here. We will assume, not establish, that whatever pattern there is to people’s social behaviour is a consequence, in part anyway, of their shared conceptual framework and of the shared beliefs, attitudes, and expectations that are framed in terms of it. However, this empirical assumption does not imply anything about our claim that the system of regulation and organization is intersubjective. This empirical assumption refers only to what explains (at least in general terms) the pattern to people’s social behaviour. It leaves open questions about the essential nature of the regularities and collectivities that make up a social system. To establish our intersubjectivity claim we must analyse the concepts of these regularities and collectivities in intersubjective terms.\(^1\)

The concept of consensus provides those terms. It is, of course, a familiar and perhaps central to sociology and social psychology. However, it has not been formulated as rigorously, to my knowledge, as it might be. In Part I consensus will be defined in terms of what I call mutual belief. The specific intersubjective character of mutual belief will be made explicit. Then we will use the notion of mutual belief to explicate in Part II concepts of social regularities, such as norms, rules, and conventions, and in Part III concepts of social collectivities, including role categories, social groups, and organizations. If our analyses are correct or at least close to the mark, we will have demonstrated the intersubjectivity of these social regularities and collectivities.

I Consensus as mutual belief

The notion of consensus is recognized by Klapp (1957), Scheff (1967), and a great many others (some cited by Scheff) to be central to sociological theory and to social psychology. It seems especially relevant to such topics as public opinion, mass action, norms and roles, communication, games, culture and tradition, social cohesion, and socialization. There is nothing surprising about the importance of the concept of consensus, for in so far as it implies agreement among people and the possibility of collective action (Parsons & Shils, 1951, pp. 193–4), no theory of social behaviour, whatever its emphasis or orientation, can do without that concept. This I take to be uncontroversial.

The formulation of the concept is another matter. Scheff (1967) notes that the most natural definition, consensus merely as individual agreement, is implicit in a wide range of experimental and theoretical work, of which he cites many examples. The trouble with this simple conception, Scheff points out, is its failure to allow for the possibility of ‘pluralistic ignorance’, in which people agree but don’t realize it, and of ‘false consensus’, where people mistakenly believe that they agree. Pluralistic ignorance satisfies the simple definition but lacks the behavioural effects of genuine consensus, while false consensus may have the same effect of behaviour as genuine consensus, even though agreement is lacking. Scheff notes that Newcomb (1959) allows for these phenomena by distinguishing ‘homogeneity of orientation’ (i.e., agreement) from ‘perceived consensus’. That consensus is more than simple agreement and involves people taking another’s point of view is implicit in Mead’s (1934) notion of ‘taking the role of the generalized other’, in Dewey’s (1958, Ch. 3) ‘interpretation of perspectives’, and in Schutz’s (1962, pp. 10ff.) ‘reciprocity of perspectives’. However, we must not succumb to Durkheim’s (1953, pp. 18–21) mystery of the ‘collective consciousness’ to explicate the notion of consensus, at least if ‘collective’ is taken literally. It is one thing for people to have similar states of mind and to realize that they do, and another, paradoxical to say the least, for them to have one and the same state of mind. Scheff’s analysis of consensus is in terms of levels of agreement.

Generalizing from Laing, Phillipson & Lee’s (1966, Ch. V) account of two-person consensus, Scheff points out that among a group of people with opinions on some issue, a majority can agree or fail to agree at the first level, i.e., on the issue itself. What’s more, at the second level they could understand or fail to understand that they agree (or disagree, as the case may be). Pluralistic ignorance is a lack of understanding about agreement, and false consensus is misunderstanding about disagreement. At the third level, moreover, there can be realization or lack of realization about understanding (or lack of it) about agreement (or disagreement). Theoretically, further levels could be brought in, but practically, on Scheff’s analysis, consensus consists in majority agreement, understanding, and realization. Assuming the ‘majority’ to be a determinate part of the whole
group, Scheff points out, taking three levels of mutuality into account, that consensus is but one of eight possible situations.

I have no objection to Scheff's idea of consensus, but it can be defined more perspicuously, I believe, in terms of belief rather than agreement. We will adapt the definitions proposed in recent philosophy of language by Lewis (1960, pp. 52ff) and by Schiffer (1973, pp. 30ff), but instead of using their terms 'common knowledge' and 'mutual knowledge', respectively, we will call consensus mutual belief.¹ In our definition of it (as well as in our later analyses), the usual 'if and only if' of philosophical definitions will be supplanted by 'to the degree to which', represented for convenience by 'x', the mathematical symbol for proportionality. Mutual belief is defined over a collectivity C with respect to a proposition p:

DF It is mutually believed in C that p x
the members of C believe:
(1) that p,
(2) that the members of C believe that p, and
(3) that the members of C believe that the members of C believe that p.

This definition clearly represents Schutz's concept of the reciprocity of perspectives as constituting the intersubjectivity of beliefs, and Laing's (1968, Ch. 4) marvellous way of reformulating Durkheim's idea of the 'massiveness of a collective representation' as 'the everyone that is everywhere elsewhere'. For generally the members of C think of the members of C as 'everyone' or at least as 'everyone else', and those who think this may include everyone.

The complexity of mutual belief might make it seem to be an esoteric phenomenon, rather than the commonplace thing that it is. It might be objected that people simply don't, at least don't ordinarily, have third-level beliefs of the sort specified in the definition.² To the contrary, I claim, there are countless examples of mutual belief, mostly pertaining to humdrum matters of fact, to what is loosely called 'common sense', and to what Garfinkel (1964) calls 'background understandings'. Anything that 'everybody knows' is likely to be mutually believed. And yet it might seem gratuitous to attribute to people the belief that 'the members of C believe that the members of C believe that p'. Let us see why it is not.

Essentially, we are assuming that at least up to a point, people are conceptually able to attribute to others beliefs that they themselves have. People certainly believe that they share beliefs with others, so it seems reasonable to suppose that they can attribute the same sort of belief to others, as clause (3) assumes. That is, people can believe that others believe that they (in turn) share beliefs with others. A person might express such a belief about some commonsensical matter by saying: 'Everybody knows that, and everybody knows that everybody knows that.' The case is especially clear where just two persons are considered. On a given issue, e.g., on aspects of their personal relationship, each can think something, think the other thinks something, and think the other thinks he thinks something. The 'Interpersonal Perception Method' of Laing, Phillipson & Lee (1966) makes this abundantly plausible. Their questionnaire approach asks series of questions like, 'Do you like her?', 'Does she think you like her?', and 'Does she think you think you like her?', which elicit responses at each of the three levels.

Several points should be made to resolve any further doubts about mutual belief. First, lest there be any misapprehension, the definition of mutual belief does not imply that people believe that they mutually believe anything. That would require attributing to them a fourth-level belief, and we shouldn't be that presumptuous! Secondly, we must keep in mind the fact that a person need not be aware of a belief in order to have it. A belief is not like a headache. At any moment we are aware of very few of our countless beliefs.¹ Indeed, just because we haven't thought about something doesn't mean we have no belief about it. We all believe, even if we've never thought about it, that giraffes are taller than kangaroos and that there are more trees than telephone poles. We have innumerable beliefs of this sort, including, I suggest, third-level beliefs. Finally, to those who insist that mutual belief, as defined above, cannot be as wide-

¹ Lewis and Schiffer were both inspired by Schelling's (1960, Chs. 3–4) notion of 'mutual recognition' in his discussion of tacit communication in strategic games. I use the term 'mutual belief' since 'knowledge' implies that the belief is true and justified, which our definition does not require.

² The definitions of Lewis and of Schiffer are not limited to three levels of belief but go on indefinitely. Higher-level beliefs are in principle possible, and indeed among spies or deceptive intimates there could be divergence at level four or higher without divergence at the first three levels. However, I think this is not possible for a whole community or large group. Nevertheless, to allow for this possibility, our definition could be amended to require that no higher-level belief, if there are any, be false. Contrary to Lewis and Schiffer, however, we need not require the levels of belief to go on indefinitely.

³ A distinct point is that a person can have a belief he denies he has. Matters are further complicated by the fact that any proposition one believes has countless logical implications which one may have never thought of. It would be absurd to deny that a person believes at least some of these implied propositions that he has never thought of, but it would be equally absurd to say that he believes all of them.
spread as here claimed, we may offer a weakened, but for our purposes adequate, reformulation of clause (3):

(3’) the members of C do not believe that the members of C do not believe that p.

Since lack of belief is not necessarily disbelief (3’) does not imply that people generally have third-level beliefs but only that, if they do, these beliefs must be those required by clause (3) of the original formulation. Still, considering that people have a great many more beliefs than they think they have, including ones about propositions they would assent to if the question arose, we will retain clause (3) as it is.

It will be convenient to distinguish standing mutual beliefs from contextual ones. Standing mutual beliefs pertain to general items of information, about both the natural world and the social world. They vary culturally and need not be true. There have been such standing mutual beliefs as that the earth is round (or flat), that animals are either male or female, that people can’t fly, that birds can, that slavery is natural, that laws are God-given, that motherhood is good, and that war is necessary. Contextual mutual beliefs pertain to particular social situations, and are shared by those present. They cover matters of fact about the physical surroundings, biographical information, and what Thomas (1923, pp. 41-50) called ‘the definition of the situation’, including relevant norms and roles. In analysing later various notions of social regularities and collectivities, we will see that both standing and contextual mutual beliefs must be referred to. Also, we will have occasion to speak of mutual beliefs being activated in the sense that the participants in the situation are consciously thinking that p. These activated mutual beliefs constitute the mutual expectations that are generated on specific occasions by relevant norms, roles, and the like.

The notion of mutual belief figures centrally in our definitions of various social regularities (Part II) and social collectivities (Part III). As indicated at the outset, their definability in terms of mutual belief is meant to demonstrate and explicate the intersubjective character of what these various concepts designate. We are now in a position to see what this will mean. We often speak of something’s being ‘psychologically real’ to someone if he believes it exists, if it exists ‘for him’, irrespective of whether it really does. Similarly, we may use the phrase ‘socially real’ to apply to anything which exists ‘for’ a given society or collectivity C. However, for something to be socially or intersubjectively real for C, it must not merely be psychologically real for each member of C. After all, each might fail to realize this and perhaps even believe that it exists for him alone. Even if that is not the case and the members of C believe it to be psychologically real for one another, they might not believe or even disbelieve that others believe that. To be socially real, something must mutually be believed to exist. This is the status of the regularities and collectivities to be defined later.

Our employment of the notion of mutual belief should not give the impression that people’s second- and third-level beliefs are automatically uniform and stable. It is an empirical question, beyond the scope of philosophical analysis, how people acquire the beliefs they do and why there is the uniformity there is in a given culture. Many topics in social psychology bear on this, such as socialization, conformity and deviance, mass communication, and the social self. Moreover, mutual beliefs don’t come into existence all at once. They develop over a period of time. In the United States mutual belief in the wrongness of American involvement in the Vietnamese war took years to be realized. Indeed, the Administration’s stratagem of singling out the ‘Silent Majority’ created a long period of false consensus. Fads, fashions, and crazes seem to involve flowing and ebbing waves of mutual belief. Such phenomena as social movements, political backlashes, trends in the stock market (e.g., panic selling), landslide elections resulting from the ‘bandwagon effect’, ‘keeping up with the Joneses’, generation gaps, and religious revivals all seem to involve upsurges of mutual belief. There is no telling the degree to which mass media and the astute exploitation thereof may foster a state of pluralistic ignorance about the need for change and further a state of false consensus concerning the status quo.

Although it is provocative to speculate on the importance of the notion of mutual belief and of its deviant forms, notably pluralistic ignorance and false consensus, the following philosophical analysis will stay free as far as possible from empirical hypothesizing. Instead, it will seek to explicate, in terms of mutual belief, the concepts of various social regularities and collectivities and their intersubjectivity.

II Social regularities

Four kinds of social regularities may be distinguished: norms, practices, rules, and conventions. The reasons for distinguishing them will be explained and in fact are embodied in the definitions that will be offered. In addition, subconcepts and kindred concepts of the above four will be
singed out. The key notion of mutual belief will figure in each definition.

Norms

What is a social norm? Landis (1971, p. 288) defines a norm as 'the accepted or required behavior for a person in a particular situation'. According to Secord and Backman (1974, p. 300), 'a social norm is an expectation shared by group members which specifies behavior that is appropriate for a given situation'. They note (p. 402) that expectations are both 'anticipatory' and 'normative' in nature, and thus social norms are also. This descriptive/evaluative ambiguity is suggested by the adjectives 'normal' and 'normative', so a norm is both a regularity and a regulation. Landis's definition mentions merely the normative aspect of norms, but it seems that to count as a norm, the behaviour in question must be generally performed, and not merely a generally unfulfilled standard. However, we will follow Landis in calling the expected behaviour rather than the expectation itself the norm. Nothing crucial rides on this terminological preference, but it will facilitate the formulation of our definition.

Our definition must embody the fact that a social norm is not merely a statistical regularity nor merely a standard that people might hardly ever observe. Thus, our definition must exclude cases like people's putting on their pants before their shoes, and cases like never showing temper. Also, our definition must express the social reality of norms. Letting 'A' designate the kind of behaviour in question, 'S' the kind of recurrent situation to which the norm applies, and 'MB' mutual belief:

DF2 A (in S) is a social norm in C ̸⊂

(1) the members of C do A in S,
(2) it is MB in C that (1), and
(3) it is MB in C that the members of C should do A in S.

It follows from this definition that when S arises, the mutual beliefs spec-
ied will be activated in the people involved, and so, assuming they identify one another as members of C, they will mutually expect one another to do A. In some cases, of course, the specification of A may designate only a certain kind of agent, such as children, drivers, or guests. In this case only the specified kind of agent can fulfil or violate the norm, but still the mutual beliefs are shared by all.

Among the types of action that the variable 'A' ranges over are negative actions, such as not picking your nose or not embracing strangers. When such a description is plugged into the definition, what the members of C 'do' is not perform a certain action. For such negative norms, as we might call them, we may formulate a separate definition:

DF3 There is a social norm in C against A (in S) ̸⊂

(1) the members of C do not do A in S,
(2) it is MB in C that (1), and
(3) it is MB in C that the members of C should not do A in S.

Logically speaking, this definition is superfluous, provided we allow 'A' in DF2 to range over negative actions. Nevertheless, it is worth formulating this definition of negative social norms, for a great many social norms are of this type, proscriptions rather than prescriptions. (For subsequent definitions, the negative forms will be omitted.)

It is possible, indeed common, for some without all of the clauses in DF2 to be satisfied. Several cases are worth labelling:

DF4 A (in S) is a statistical regularity in C ̸⊂

(1) the members of C do A in S.

Sometimes the term 'norm' (as opposed to 'social norm') is used to designate statistical regularities.¹

Statistical regularities need not be recognized by the people to whom they apply, and social scientists have discovered a great many of these (including many pertaining to topics other than behaviour). However, we should single out the case where the members of C themselves are aware, indeed mutually aware, of such a regularity, for in this event, when S arises, there will be a mutual expectation that A be done.

DF5 A (in S) is a social regularity² in C ̸⊂

(1) the members of C do A in S, and
(2) it is MB in C that (1).

¹ Horton & Hunt (1964, p. 57) call them 'statistical norms'.
² In general, when 'social' modifies any of our defined expressions, it implies 'socially real by virtue of mutual belief'.
Since clause (3) of DF2 is absent, the mutual expectation that arises in S need not be normative in nature, but merely empirical. Notice, by the way, that clause (2) might hold without (1) holding, in which case the MB would be false. Such a socially imagined regularity might have occurred, i.e., such a false mutual belief might have prevailed, as to sexual behaviour when it was a hush-hush subject.

Finally we might define the case where a certain type of behaviour is mutually recognized as the standard even when people generally don’t live up to it:

DF6 A (in S) is a social standard in C if
(3) it is MB in C that the members of C should do A in S.

Of course, a standard may also be a statistical regularity, and if it is a social regularity as well, then it is a social norm. A social standard is a special case of a social value, which might be defined as anything (not just behaviour) which is mutually believed in C to be of value.

Behaviour that is the standard, including that which is the norm, is mutually believed in C to be what people should do, or should not do, in the case of negative norms. In between is the whole range of things that are socially acceptable to do, neither required nor forbidden. Accordingly, we can say that a type of behaviour is socially acceptable if there is no standard that requires not doing it, i.e., no standard against it.

Having defined some of the concepts that fall under it, let us return briefly to the concept of social norm itself, as analysed in DF2. Even though the definition implies that when S arises people mutually expect A to be performed, it does not imply anything about people’s reasons for doing A. A person, utilizing the expectations implied by the definition, might do A to receive approval, to avoid being socially rejected (or punished), to appear mentally normal, to avoid suspicion, etc. He may have no reason at all and do A out of habit. Why people conform to norms depends on the norm and on the person, but this is a topic for social psychology, not philosophical analysis.

DF2 does not imply that there must be a sanction for every norm—some norms are more serious than others, and some people are more serious about norms than others. Nevertheless, because norms are mutually expected to be followed, it is not surprising than when someone violates a norm, other people may react accordingly. As Hart (1961, pp. 54–6) puts it, norms have an ‘internal aspect’, in that they provide a basis for ‘criticism of others and demands for conformity’ that should yield ‘acknowledgement of the legitimacy of such criticism and demands when received from others’. In short, norms are not only followed but also applied. Indeed, there are norms regarding the violation of norms. Depending on the seriousness of the offence, there may be a norm for others to criticize the violator and to demand amends or at least apology. But in some cases there is a norm against saying anything—it would be impolite, cause embarrassment, or create a scene. And of course, again depending on the case, there are norms for violators, e.g., to apologize, to offer a legitimate excuse, and, where possible, to make amends. But again, there is sometimes a norm against the offender saying anything.1

Practices

A type of act’s being the norm does not entail what people’s reasons are for doing it. Even if a person believes he should do it, that may not be his reason for doing it. However, there is a special case of social norms, which will be labelled social practices, that have a reason for action built into their definition. There is a definitional connection between the existence of a practice and people’s reason for following it, for a practice is a norm that people follow in order to conform, in order to be like others or at least to seem to be. Norms in general can be followed for this reason, but practices by definition are. Thus,

DF7 A (in S) is a social practice in C if
(1) A (in S) is a social norm in C, and
(2) people’s reason for doing A in S is, at least partly, that it is generally done.

Of course, the definition of norms (DF2) implies that people who follow a norm recognize that others do, but it does not imply that this is their reason for doing so, even if part of their reason is that following the norm must be the right thing to do because others do it—that’s not the reason specified in clause (2) of DF7. Typical examples of practices include dressing in accordance to one’s sex (or class or age), social drinking, and standing for the National Anthem.

It might be objected that there is a vicious circle built into the definition of practices: the members of C do A partly because the members of C do A. However, this is not a vicious circle but an endless chain. Each does A

1These phenomena are discussed in Watzlawick et al. (1967) under ‘meta-communication’ and in Laing (1969), whose notion of ‘metarules’ is applicable.
partly because others have been doing A (and can be expected to continue to). Naturally, this could not have always been everyone’s reason, but the definition does not require this—A needn’t always have been a practice. During the period in which a practice comes into being, as people begin performing the action in question, their reasons for doing it and their beliefs about the extent of its being done may be unclear and in flux, whereas once the practice is established and stable, mutual belief in its existence and continuation prevail.

Rapidly changing practices, such as fads and fashions, are an interesting special case. Dance crazes, hair styles, and dress fashions are practices which people follow in order to do what is ‘in’, to be ‘with it’ (these locations are no longer in fashion). Most people don’t want to appear ‘out of it’, and as styles periodically change, the idea is to be neither too far ahead of the game nor too far behind it (style setters are a special type here). Notice, by the way, that the collectivity C in which a fad or fashion prevails may be specifiable only as that in which the fad or fashion prevails—the ‘in crowd’ consists of those who do what is ‘in’.

Rules

The term ‘social rule’ will be used to designate any social norm that entails some special social obligation (in addition to the general obligation to follow norms). What Gouldner (1960) calls the ‘norm of reciprocity’ and what Secord and Backman (1974, pp. 327–33) call ‘norms of social responsibility’ count as rules in our sense. Four different kinds of rules warrant being defined here, and since there is no precedent (to my knowledge) for terminology that marks these distinct kinds, for reasons that will become evident, I will call them co-ordinative rules, co-operative rules, collective rules, and regulations. These categories are not mutually exclusive.

There are social rules, like driving on the right, speaking in turn, and going to the end of the line, whose point is to coordinate the activity of a number of people who are trying to do more or less the same thing with a minimum of interference from others. Thus, each person who follows such a rule is doing his part in a joint effort to co-ordinate the activities (driving, communicating, buying a ticket) of all involved. Thus,

\[ DF8 \]

A (in S) is a co-ordinative rule in C $\infty$

(1) A (in S) is a social norm in C, and
(2) it is MB in C that general performance of A in S enables the members of C each to do some act B with a minimum of interference from one another.

Notice that the definition requires only that general performance of A be mutually believed to minimize interference—whether it does so is another matter.

There are many actions whose performance by one person makes sense only if many others do so as well, e.g., recycling cans and bottles, conserving energy, and going out on strike. If one has good reason to believe that hardly anyone else will do A, one has little reason to do it oneself. These ‘cumulative actions’, as I call them elsewhere (Bach, 1975), yield collective goods or prevent collective evils. Collective goods are goods that everyone enjoys if anyone does, such as clean air, quiet in a library, or higher wages (in a union shop). Collective evils hurt everyone (not that a few don’t benefit from them also) if they hurt anyone, as with air pollution and oil shortages. Now the so-called ‘free rider’ problem arises when people refuse to perform a cumulative action (e.g., conserving energy or not littering) because enough others will do it anyway. The problem is that if too many people think this, too few will perform the cumulative action—unless there is a rule requiring each person to contribute his effort. We might call this a ‘co-operative rule’;

\[ DF9 \]

A cumulative action A is a co-operative rule in C $\infty$

(1) As in a social norm in C, and
(2) it is MB in C that general performance of A tends to produce some collective good or prevent some collective evil.

Needless to say, clause (2) requires only a mutual belief, not the truth of it, so conceivably general observance of a co-operative rule could turn out to be detrimental to C.

Rules that organize collective action out of individual efforts might be called collective rules. Rules that divide labour in a family, a tribe, or a company are collective in this sense. In general, a collective rule apportions assignments to different members of C, whose combined action is presumed to further the interests of C or its members. Thus, to follow a collective rule is to do one’s part. Accordingly,

\[ 1 \]

Lacking here is what Lewis (1966) calls a ‘coordination equilibrium’. Olson (1965) argues that only very special circumstances preclude the free rider problem.
A set of actions $A_1, \ldots, A_n$ is a collective rule in $C$ if
(1) to do one’s part is the social norm in $C$,
(2) there is a mutually recognized procedure for determining each person’s part, and
(3) each person’s part is one of $A_1, \ldots, A_n$.

Notice that the definition does not require that each member of $C$ to be aware of what everyone else’s assignment is, but only that everybody has one (several might have the same). In a formal organization (to be defined in Part III), there are people whose part is to determine others’ parts, whereas in an informal group the apportionment of parts could be arrived at by mutual agreement rather than executive edict. We will see later that a formal organization can be thought of as governed by a system of collective rules.

Finally, we may define a regulation as a norm that is enacted, promulgated, or otherwise imposed on $C$ by some mutually recognized authority (it may or may not be legitimate—having power does not imply having the right to exercise it). Generally, a regulation is codified or otherwise made official, but this is not required by our definition:

A (in $S$) is a regulation in $C$ if
(1) A (in $S$) is a social norm in $C$, and
(2) by virtue of some mutually recognized authority, A (in S) is required in $C$.

Political regulations are laws, and regulations generally (but not necessarily) have sanctions enforcing their observance. It should be noted that a regulation can also be a co-ordinative, a co-operative, or a collective rule.

Conventions

The adjective ‘conventional’ is remarkably ambiguous. It can signify what is artificial, unnatural, usual, orthodox, fashionable, co-operative, arbitrary, or agreed upon. The noun ‘convention’ is almost as ambiguous, but for our purposes, there seem to be only three relevant senses: a custom, a kind of co-operative behaviour, or an agreement. In each case, moreover, there is the idea of the arbitrary—a convention has equally reasonable alternatives, but what matters is uniformity. Now we have covered the first two senses under the headings of ‘social practice’ and ‘co-operative rule’, respec-

Our use of ‘convention’ falls under the third sense, that of an agreement or, to be precise, what is agreed upon. Since a great many sorts of things can be agreed upon, our use of ‘convention’ will be even more restricted, referring specifically to an agreed upon means for doing something. Conventions of this sort occur in the game of bridge, such as the Blackwood convention and the Stayman convention. Bridge conventions are conventional means, within the rules of bidding, for requesting or conveying information. Similarly, a language is a system of conventions for communicating, and money is a conventional means of exchange. So in general a convention exists by virtue of a mutual understanding (there need not be explicit agreement) that an act of a certain sort counts as doing such and such in a certain situation:

A (in $S$) is the convention for D-ing in $C$ if
(1) it is MB in $C$ that whenever a member of $C$ does $A$ in $S$, he is D-ing, and
(2) A counts as D-ing in $S$ only because it is MB in $C$ to count as such.

Clearly, the second condition is necessary in order to exclude cases of mutually recognized habitual action, such as the act of trying to get warm by putting on a coat. Thus, the definition says that $A$ conventionally counts as $D$ just in case it is mutually regarded as such and because it is.

Specification of the situation is essential because, for example, shaking hands is a way of greeting in one situation, a way of bidding farewell in another, and a way of sealing a bet or an agreement in still another situat-

Unlike the other sorts of social regularities we have considered, conventions are not what people expect one another to do in certain situations. Rather, they are actions which, if done in certain situations, count as doing something else. A great deal of institutional and formalized behaviour is conventional in this sense. Only in certain circumstances does a certain kind of act count, as the case may be, as taking an oath of office, kicking a field goal, pronouncing a couple as man and wife, seconding a motion, declaring a state of emergency, finding someone guilty, calling a meeting to order, arresting someone, saluting an officer, and so on. Linguistic acts of this sort were first studied by Austin (1962) and subsequently by Searle (1969) and Bach, Fraser, and Harnish (in progress), among others. It should be noted that there can be rules requiring the performance of con-

 conventional actions, e.g., saluting, taking an oath, and arresting someone, but such rules must be distinguished from the corresponding conventions.1

The notion of convention has been defined for actions, but can be extended to types of persons, situations, and objects. For example, being a wife or a judge requires having some mutually recognized feature that may include performing some conventional action (like vowing) or being the object of such an action (like being appointed). Analogously, a situation's being a trial, a debate, a football game, or a wedding is a matter of convention, and the same goes for something's being a military uniform, a stoplight, a national flag, or a crucifix.

III Social collectivities

There are two basic senses in which people are said to be grouped. They can be grouped either in the sense of being categorized together or in the sense of interacting with one another. Sociologists generally call the first sort of grouping a category while reserving the term group for the second. The only relationship members of a category have, generally, is that of having something in common, the feature that places them in that category, whereas the relationship among members of a group is their pattern of interaction. Further distinctions, of course, must be drawn here, and they will be the subject of our detailed analysis. A role category is a socially recognized category whose behavior is subject to specific expectations. Role categories include both positions and social types, and the notion of role itself must be explained. We shall see that there are ambiguities in the notion of role (akin to those we saw earlier in the notion of social norm), and these have to be resolved. Under the heading of groups we will distinguish, in increasing order of structure and complexity, face-to-face groups, crowds, social groups and organizations. As before, the notion of mutual belief will have a central place in all our definitions.

Role categories

There are all sorts of ways people can be classified, e.g., as to age, sex, race height, personality, nationality, and profession. Some categories are not

1 Rawls's (1955) 'practice conception of rules' and Searle's (1969) 'constitutive rules' are similar to our conventions. Unfortunately, their accounts do not clearly distinguish rules from the corresponding conventions.

recognized by the general public but only by social scientists, and of course there is divergence among them, e.g., on the categorization of personality types. Not every category is worth singling out, either because it is nearly vacuous (blue-eyed, teen-aged businesswomen) or because no significant empirical generalization can be made over it (left-handed pawnbrokers born on odd-numbered Thursdays). Chinoy (1961, pp. 82–3) calls categories over which empirical generalizations can be made 'statistical aggregates', although the more common use of the term 'aggregate', as Landis (1971, p. 62) points out, refers to a number of people clustered in one area or region. At any rate, we should distinguish categories that are socially recognized, and over which there are social expectations, from those recognized only by social scientists, and over which there are merely statistical regularities.

I will follow Secord & Backman (1974, p. 492) and use the term 'role category' here. Sociologists commonly use the term 'status' to designate a position in a group (Horton & Hunt, 1964, p. 118) or in a social structure (Mack & Young, 1968, p. 133) or in either (Landis, 1971, p. 35). However, people also classify another another by personality traits and behavioural idiosyncrasies. These social types, as Klapp (1962) calls them, include fools, egotists, heroes, nice guys, creeps, bigots, big shots, and cheapskates. We will use the term position, rather than 'status' with its evaluative connotations, to designate a place in a group or social relation, and the term role category will cover both positions and social types, depending on the feature(s) ('F') involved.

DF13 A set of people with F is a role category in C × (1) it is MB in C that F is used to classify people in C, and (2) there is some social regularity, standard, or norm applying to people with F.

Clause (1) says that it is mutually recognized in C that people classify one another in terms of F and not-F (e.g., American/foreign) or along a dimension on which F lies (e.g., Italian on the dimension of nationality). Clause (2) requires that F not be some idle category that doesn't pertain to the behaviour of people with F and to people's mutual beliefs about the behaviour of people with F. In this way, role categories are relevant to people's social behaviour and awareness of it, for they apply to people about whom there are special mutual expectations.1 In discussing roles below,

1 Thus, a subcategory of a role category may fail to be a role category. Subcategories like 14-year-olds or 15th-pounders are too specific to have their own regularities or standards.
we will see why clause (2) requires *either* a social regularity, a standard, or a norm to apply to people with the feature(s) defining a role category.

The term *social role* (or simply *role*) is highly ambiguous. Secord & Backman (1974, p. 405) note that it can refer to a role category or to the expectations associated with that category (*role expectations*). Most writers use the term ‘role’ to refer to the expected behaviour itself, e.g., Cuber (1963, p. 299), Horton & Hunt (1964, p. 118), and Landis (1971, p. 35). As Bierstedt puts it, role categories or ‘statuses are occupied, roles are played’ (1969, p. 262). So we will restrict the term ‘role’ to the expected behaviour, although this is not to be confused with what Secord & Backman (1974, pp. 405–6) call ‘role behavior’ which is whatever a person in a given role category actually does relevant to the role expectations, whether or not he fulfills them.

If this isn’t ambiguity enough, restricting the term ‘role’ to the expected behaviour must allow for the fact that expectations can be normative or merely anticipatory (as we observed in discussing norms). Our account of the notion of role should reflect this distinction, since some roles are expected (anticipated) but hardly required to be played. Everybody expects a boor to act rudely, but nobody (besides himself) thinks he should. Accordingly, the use of the term ‘role’ must be restricted further and other terms introduced to fully resolve the ambiguities inherent in standard usage. We will distinguish between *roles* as social regularities, *role standards* (Landis, 1971, p. 35, calls them ‘role requirements’) as social standards, and *normative roles* as combinations of both. Thus, letting ‘R’ range over patterns of behaviour (since roles typically include a cluster rather than a single kind of behaviour),

\[DF14\]

R is a *role* for people of role category F in C \( \equiv \)

(1) in C people with F exhibit R, and
(2) it is MB in C that (1).

\[DF15\]

R is a *role standard* for F in C \( \equiv \)

(3) it is MB in C that in C people with F should exhibit R.

\[DF16\]

R is a *normative role* for F in C \( \equiv \)

(1) in C people with F exhibit R,
(2) it is MB in C that (1), and
(3) it is MB in C that in C people with F should exhibit R.

Generally speaking, roles but not role standards apply to social types, like fools, bigots, and cheapskates, whereas positions, like parents, preachers, and politicians have role standards (or even normative roles, if it is mutually believed that they meet their standards and they do). It is important to make the distinctions embodied in these definitions, because the expectations (mutual beliefs activated in particular situations) that are directed at people of a given type or position can be anticipatory, normative, or both. Which they are depends on the type of position, and on people’s associated mutual beliefs.

There is a reason why social types are generally associated with roles and positions with role standards: roles generally define social types, while positions generally define role standards. In other words, one belongs to a type (fool, hot shot, ladies’ man) in virtue of what he does, whereas one does certain things because of his position (coach, custodian, columnist). However, there are exceptions to this generalization. Social types like nudists and cigar smokers are subject to role standards, and others, like ladies and heroes, are defined by the standards they live up to (normative roles). These considerations show that Linton’s (1936, Ch. 8) well-known distinction between ‘ascribed and achieved statuses’, i.e., role categories, and the corresponding distinction between ascribed and achieved roles (e.g., Cuber, 1963, p. 299) must be refined to allow for the differences between social types and positions and those between roles and role standards. For example, a position can be achieved without fulfilling the standards it requires, while a social type generally requires playing the role that defines it.

It should be noted that roles (and role standards) often interlock, in the sense that they may specify how people of one position (or type) act (or are to act) with regard to people of the same or of some other position (or type). Organizations (DF18 below) are a complex instance of this. A final point about our definitions is that when clause (2) is satisfied without clause (1), we have the case of a social *stereotype*, where there is a false mutual belief in C about some minority’s behaviour.

*Groups*

In the broadest sense of the term, a group can be a category, an aggregate,
or a role category, but here, following general usage in social science, the term 'group' will be more restrictive. Even so, groups can range from strangers in brief, perfunctory interaction to a formal organization. Despite the variation on this continuum, groups all have the feature that their members have some sort of structured relationship, be it mutual expectations based on social norms that are applied anonymously or a rich set of mutual beliefs based on personal acquaintance. We will distinguish four kinds of groups with the terms face-to-face group, crowd, social group, and organizations.

No special definition (i.e., in terms of mutual belief) is needed for a face-to-face group, which is any combination of people engaged in any kind of direct interaction, however brief, casual, and routine. The persons involved may be personally acquainted or members of the same social group or organization (see definitions below), in which case specific norms and role standards apply. But even unacquainted and unrelated participants in the most fleeting random encounter have mutual expectations based on general social norms and on contextual mutual beliefs as to their respective identities and the definition of the situation. As Homans (1961, p. 4) says, 'elementary social behavior occurs at all times and never lacks form'.

Not just any aggregate of people in proximity constitutes a group. Pedestrians on a busy mall, passengers on a commuter train, and shoppers in a department store do not constitute a group—there need not be any interaction or structured relationship among co-present persons, at least over and above that which follows from the observance of general social norms, such as common courtesies. There is no action as a group or as members of a group. However, in the event of a sudden emergency or anything which captures everyone’s attention, collective action quickly becomes possible. Suddenly they become aware—indeed mutually aware—of the same thing. Landis (1971, p. 211) defines a crowd as 'a temporary collection of people in close physical contact reacting together to a common stimulus'. We should add the requirement that they be mutually aware of the stimulus. The phrase 'reacting together' does not imply this—they might be reacting simultaneously but without being mutually aware of the stimulus or of each other. There are many kinds of crowds, of course, e.g., audiences, mobs, and social gatherings. Turner and Killian (1957, Ch. 5) differentiate expressive and active crowds, and make further distinctions beyond this. It should be noted that the subject of collective behaviour covers much more than crowds (see Blumer, 1957 and Turner & Killian, 1957).

People having something in common need not have any common interest or mutual awareness. They need not have any special pattern of interaction. What we will call a social group has these features. This accords fairly well with Bierstedt’s (1963, Ch. 10) and Landis’s (1971, pp. 61–2) idea of a social group as entailing ‘consciousness of kind’ (or a ‘we’ feeling) and patterned interaction. Our definition is meant to explicate this idea:

DF17 C is a social group if

1. the members of C have some feature F in common, together with an associated interest I,
2. it is MB in C that (1),
3. partly because of (1) and (2), the members of C think of C as ‘we’, and
4. partly because of (1), (2), and (3), there is a pattern of interaction in C governed by a set of norms (including co-operative rules) and normative roles, MB in C to further I.

Social groups range from friendships, families, and cliques to clubs, unions, and professional associations (the latter groups have organizations within them). The above definition is intended to capture the idea of a collection of people mutually regarding themselves as a unit (‘we’) to which they belong, united by having something in common, including a mutual interest that is presumably furthered in their group activities. All four clauses are necessary, because, for example, clauses (1) and (2) can be satisfied without (3) or (4), as in the case of social types like baseball fans or fat people. Indeed, the first three clauses can be satisfied without (4), as illustrated by an oppressed class (or race) with what Marxists call ‘class consciousness’ but with no organized activity. A social group, at least in the restricted sense defined here, must have the features specified by all four clauses.

The mutual beliefs associated with social types and positions (see DF13) prevail in the community at large, whereas those associated with social groups need not extend beyond the group itself. In other words, membership in a social group, as opposed to a role category, is determined by the members themselves. Thus, to become a member of an existing social

1 Even in social scientific contexts, the term ‘group’ is sometimes used so broadly as to include role categories or even categories simpliciter, as in ‘ethnic group’, ‘age group’, ‘opinion group’, and ‘reference group’. Members of such groups need not share any degree of structured relationship, although they could form groups in the narrower sense of ‘social group’ defined in this section.

1 Cuber’s (1963, p. 311) notion is broader, ‘any number of persons in reciprocal communication’, as is Horton & Hunt’s (1964, p. 175), ‘the essence of a social group is consciousness of joint interaction’.
group, a person must be regarded by the established members as a member himself, perhaps by fulfilling some membership requirement over and above sharing the feature F and the interest I (as required by the definition). Otherwise, he won't be regarded by the members as 'one of us', and won't join in the group activity (or won't be allowed to). A membership requirement is a convention in C of the form, 'If a person with F does A, then he becomes a member of C'. Sometimes A is going through a ceremony or receiving some kind of initiation.

In the case of a social group being formed, its existence and membership in it are a matter of mutual acknowledgment. This is true for a 'primary group', where there is intimate face-to-face contact between members (Cooley, 1909, pp. 23ff.), throughout its existence. Members all know one another on an individual basis, and it is the 'We' feeling itself more than anything else that determines membership. In this respect such groups as consanguine families and athletic teams are borderline cases between primary and secondary groups.

Our definition of social groups should be consistent with the fact that groups can persist even though the membership changes (this is true mainly of secondary groups). The definition does not indicate how at different times different sets of people could constitute the same group. It seems that the main condition of identity over time is continuity of membership. At the very least, this means that at no time are there all new members. In practice, of course, groups have names, symbols, meeting-places, traditions and the like to provide continuity over time. In theory, however, there is no surefire way to settle all questions of identity. It is easy to imagine situations where it is undecidable whether the same group still exists or where, after a group divides into two, it is undecidable which, if either, is the original group and which the splinter group.

Organizations

A formal organization is much more structured than our last definition (DF17) requires a social group to be. Its members are clearly differentiated by position, to which specific duties and responsibilities are attached. Collective rules (DF16) with the status of regulations (DF11) prescribe interconnecting normative roles (DF16) that organize the activity of people in the same and in different positions. Unlike in a social group, in an organization the members need not have anything in common (other than being members) or any common interest, and they need not share any 'we' feeling. Rather than identify with the organization, they may be motivated only extrinsically, by rewards or by threat of punishment. To be sure, an organization may have features of a social group, just as a social group may have those of an organization (or contain an administrative organization within it). DF18 and the following definition of organizations are not mutually exclusive:

DF18 C is an organization if there exist in C

1. a differentiated set of positions defined by conventions, and rules for filling them,
2. collective rules determining normative roles for each position (duties and responsibilities),
3. collective rules for how and when to follow (2) (procedures),
4. lines of authority between positions and channels of communication for exercising authority, and
5. conventions for recognizing the above rules.

The first four clauses in the definition specify the distinct elements of structure that constitute a formal organization, the rule-governed patterns of action and interaction of people in differentiated positions with specified duties and responsibilities (and procedures for carrying them out). Strictly speaking, clause (4), referring to lines of authority and channels of communication, is redundant, since the rules specified in the previous clauses must, in any real organization, cover authority and communication. In order to differentiate official from unofficial patterns of interaction, organization theorists, e.g., March and Simon (1958) and Scott (1967), often distinguish 'authority' from 'influence'. In our terminology the official rules specifying authority relations, indeed the official rules generally, are regulations in the sense of DF11, whereas influence relations are governed by informal social norms and further determined by particular personal relationships and norms of groups within the organization.

Clause (5) refers to what Hart (1961, pp. 92ff.) calls 'rules of recognition', but since they determine what count as rules, we will call them conventions. In an organization such conventions require not merely that rules be mutually recognized but that they meet special conditions, such as being enacted and codified. In effect, then, clause (5) stipulates a mutually recognized means for determining what the rules are.

1 Group identification (and alienation) are discussed in Bach (1973, Ch. 2). Our distinction between social groups and organizations corresponds to Tonnies's (1957) famous distinction between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft.
Conclusion

The analysis of basic social concepts, as attempted here, is meant to elucidate their meanings and spell out their connections. The central concept, mutual belief, refines the notion of consensus, which sociologists have recognized to be central not only to the description of a great many social phenomena but also to the analysis of key social concepts. By systematically defining these concepts in terms of mutual belief, we make explicit their intersubjective character. The social reality of the regularities and collectivities thus defined is constituted by people's mutually dependent actions, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus, the philosophical thesis of definitional individualism is favoured over holism, and we need not succumb to the reification advised by Durkheim of 'considering social facts as things'. Nevertheless, we are in a position to understand why social facts can strike people as things—their being socially real is sufficient for that.

Apart from whatever theoretical understanding they provide, our definitions of basic social concepts have definite empirical possibilities. They are formulated in terms of people's behaviour and beliefs, and these are subject to empirical investigation. Moreover, the definitions do not state 'if and only if' relationships, as philosophical analyses generally do, but 'to the degree to which (ε)' relationships. Properly quantified, these can become determinate functional relationships characteristic of scientific propositions. The existence of norms, roles, groups, and the rest is a matter of degree, as our formulations reflect, and empirical investigation can determine the degree to which particular norms, roles, etc., do exist and how it varies over time, as they gradually come into and go out of existence, their scopes broadening and narrowing.

Definitions are not theories and do not explain the phenomena whose concepts they formulate. However, I think the concept of mutual belief, and more generally the social distribution of belief (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), including the cases of pluralistic ignorance and false consensus (Scheff, 1967), have great explanatory potential. Phenomena come to mind like socialization, person perception, public opinion, social cohesion, and mass action, to name but a few topics of sociology and social psychology. I would hope, moreover, that our concepts might help integrate these two fields. Social structure and social behaviour are not separate subjects, and our formulation of basic social concepts, reflecting their intersubjectivity, should be congenial to both fields.

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Art Objects as People: a New Paradigm for the Psychology of Art

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The psychology of art studies the artist, his creative processes, the experiencing of the art object, and the effects of such experience. The focal element in all of these domains is the art object. Recent reviews of psychological aesthetics (Berlyne, 1971; Child, 1969, 1972) have identified the art object as a medium of communication, a source of information. Thus, a considerable amount of research has examined, defined, and measured the meaning of art objects. This paper proposes a reconceptualization of the art object that incorporates the communication paradigm and permits paradigms from other areas of social psychology, such as cognitive consistency, social comparison, and interpersonal attraction, to be extended to include the study of art.

Art Objects as People

It is generally acknowledged that art imitates, expresses, or represents life. In this context, life includes subjective experiences such as thoughts and feelings as well as overt behavior. A given work of art can portray an idea, an emotional state, an attitude, a character, an interpersonal interaction, or various combinations of these to create entire lives. For example, art has been viewed as an imitation of Ideal Forms (Plato, 1653), an imitation of 'action and life' (Aristotle, 1965, p. 46), the material expression of Ideal Spirit (Hegel, 1835), and the objectification of inner subjective experience (Langer, 1957). To say that all good art is vital or alive is nearly a truism among art theorists (e.g., Langer, 1957; Read, 1956), art historians (e.g., Clark, 1969; Janzen, 1962), and the artists themselves (e.g., Hedgcooe & Moore, 1968).

The vitality perceived in good works of art is a joint function of the compositional structure imposed by the artist and the projections of the

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