Society: Toward an Objective View

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Since there is no such entity as "society," since society is only a number of individual men . . . (Rand 1964, 109)

A great deal may be learned about society by studying man; but this process cannot be reversed: nothing can be learned about man by studying society—by studying the interrelationships of entities one has never identified or defined. (Rand 1967, 15).

Man does live in society, not on a desert island. But that does not mean society "develops" him. The expression "develops in society" implies that man *is* a social animal. I believe no such thing.

The issue here is: What is primary in a man's development, society or his own mind? Of course, his own mind has primacy. Society cannot make or unmake him. . . . Society cannot form a person. It cannot force him to accept ideas; but it can discourage him. Nevertheless, that doesn't make man a social animal. (Rand 2005, 156)

. . . you are permitted to regard as an entity, for purposes of study, a collection of human beings such as a society, but you are not permitted then to say that metaphysically it is an organism, tied together by some ineffable means. You cannot say it is anything other than a group of a certain kind of entities, living beings, and you regard them as one entity only from a certain aspect—that they live in the same geographical locality under the same type of government and laws. (Rand 1990, 272)

The whole relation of man to society has to be defined, its proper order stated: Man, the entity, first—*then* his relation to society. Society is only the sum of individuals, therefore the order is natural, logical and proper: individual entity, rights, and morality *first*, then the secondary matters pertaining to society, to the established entity's relation with others. If relations are placed first—*who is it* that's having relations, *whom* are we talking about?

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> In any clash between the *individual* and the *social*, the *individual* must win, the individual has the right and the priority. (But be sure that the individual is *strictly* individual and clearly defined as such.) ("The Moral Basis of Individualism" [26 October 1944] in Rand 1999, 269)

Objectivism, which falls within the classical liberal tradition, recognizes the importance of the individual as a key constituent of reality. Rand recognized the social context in which individuals exist, and from this inferred a set of noncontradictory individual rights that made life in society equitable.[1] She also recognized that society is a relational entity,

> a set of moral-political-economic principles embodied in a society's laws, institutions, and government, which determine the relationships, the terms of association, among the men living in a given geographical area. It is obvious that these terms and relationships depend on an identification of man's nature, that they would be different if they pertain to a society of rational beings or to a society of ants. (Rand 1988, 462)

Yet, while recognizing that human beings live in groups, she sometimes seemed to indicate that human social life carried little significance beyond the collection of individuals it comprised, as some of the above quotations illustrate. Although she recognized society as a relational entity, and that it was associated with human nature, from her philosophical perspective, she established the individual as prior to society. While the primacy of the individual over society seems to make logical sense, from an anthropological perspective, this is problematic precisely because society arises from human nature itself, as Rand herself seemed to understand. On the other hand, Rand also wrote: "Man is not a lone wolf and he is not a social animal. He is a *contractual* animal" (Rand 1972, 127). Thus, Rand's various takes on the social do generate some degree of confusion as to the status of society and the role of individuals in it.

While it is true that society consists of individuals, it does not follow that it is therefore not an entity worth understanding in its own right. Society does not depend on any one individual's actions to sustain itself. Rather, it depends on the stable relationships among its

members, as defined by the rules of any society. Generations of individuals maintain society through these rules and relationships, but these relationships are necessary, not optional, to human well being, because societies arise and sustain themselves based on a common human nature.

Human nature is the basis for the existence of society, because human beings *are* social animals. Aristotle acknowledged as much, and so have scores of other scholars across the ages.[2] However, it is also clear that human beings act as individuals, and they can act against their own interests and against the interests of the society in which they live—that is, against the rules to which most individuals in the society subscribe. They both sustain human society and occasionally topple it. This seemingly contradictory fact has been the basis of continuing dispute within the social sciences over the relative merits of the individual and society. It is my purpose in this paper to demonstrate how this "contradiction" can be resolved by acknowledging that both individuality and sociality are attributes of human nature and, therefore, constituents of objective reality.

Society is a naturally occurring phenomenon—not a floating abstraction—a relational entity that can be observed and studied. As F. A. Hayek (1979, 69) once noted:

> If social phenomena showed no order except insofar as they were consciously designed, there would indeed be no room for theoretical sciences of society and there would be . . . only problems of psychology. It is only insofar as some sort of order arises as a result of individual action but without being designed by any individual that a problem is raised which demands a theoretical explanation.

Society is such an order. A society is a collection of individuals organized in a specific way. This organization arises and is perpetuated by the fact that human beings must associate with other human beings in order to realize their humanity and to sustain themselves. Society is the manifestation of *sociality*—that human attribute that necessitates interaction with other human beings. As can be shown, society is necessary for individual development and survival. Society results in the passing on of accumulated knowledge, but that knowl-

edge is bound up in the beliefs, actions, and values of a people (their culture) and is not easily unpacked for individual analytic purposes. Rand (1964, 35–36) recognized this when she noted, echoing Hayek:

> The two great values to be gained from social existence are: knowledge and trade. Man is the only species that can transmit and expand his store of knowledge from generation to generation; the knowledge potentially available to man is greater than any one man could begin to acquire in his own lifespan; every man gets incalculable benefit from the knowledge discovered by others. The second great benefit is the division of labor: it enables a man to devote his effort to a particular field of work and trade with others who specialize in other fields. This form of cooperation allows all men who take part in it to achieve a greater knowledge, skill and productive return on their effort than they could achieve if each had to produce everything he needs . . . [3]

This knowledge exists within individuals but it is larger than any single individual, so that more individuals benefit from knowledge than those who actually possess it; there is a synergistic effect that increases with population size and specialization of labor, resulting in a vast network of human interdependence. But this is not incidental; it is fundamental to the nature of sociality.

Our knowledge of society has been derived from observation—indeed, social scientists (and philosophers, for that matter) have been observing societies for thousands of years. Rand began by assuming that without the existence of the individual, society can have no meaning, but she clearly understands the value of social life for individuals. What Rand seems to have resisted is the characterization of human beings as social animals. But her approach belies the fact that individuality and sociality are both attributes of human nature and cannot be divided. One does not precede the other in reality. They occur simultaneously; they exist simultaneously.

Societies operate according to principles precisely because human beings have natures. Rand indulged in a kind of essentialism, in which human nature was reduced to a single factor: a rational faculty, or mind. For Rand, this was what distinguished human beings from

other living entities—it was the essential difference. Yet, there are other differences just as crucial that have a bearing on the development of the rational faculty. There is a breadth to human nature that Rand never acknowledged, which includes certain anatomical features (bipedalism, stereoscopic vision, a set of fingers with opposability, and so on) as well as the attribute of *sociality*, which can be defined as the fundamental need (both physical and psychical) to associate with other human beings. Although Rand was probably not as essentialistic as her words make it appear (especially considering her attention to the theory of concepts), there is room for doubt. I wish to clear up that doubt. *Sociality is a fundamental attribute of human nature, and it plays a part in the development of the rational faculty.*

Sociality

While it is true that some other animal species are social, human sociality is of a particular kind. To say that human beings are social animals, then, is not to deny their individuality or their rationality but to acknowledge the role that sociality plays in the constitution of the whole individual, including the rational faculty. First of all, sociality arises from the need of humans to be physically touched by other humans as infants. Survival of infants depends on this. Secondly, sociality arises from the need to nurture new human beings over a long period of time. Humans have the longest maturation time of all the primates. Finally, it is also through contact with others that we learn how to be human—that is, we tap into the accumulated knowledge of the group of individuals who precede us and are taught by them so that each new individual does not have to start from the beginning. To deny the social nature of human life is to blind oneself to one aspect of human nature on which rationality depends and to ignore one of the attributes that has made human beings such a successful species.

Though sociality is a fundamental need of human beings, there is also a great deal of flexibility allowed in the exercise of that sociality. Once past infancy and childhood, the particular degree to which we associate with others and the forms that association takes differ greatly both among societies and within them. In other words, both physical distance and psychological distance may differ from one group to another within a specific range of variation.

For millions of years of human existence, people lived in small, mobile bands of related peoples numbering roughly 30–70 in size subsisting through foraging (gathering, hunting, fishing, and scavenging) and generally mastering their environments. We can infer also from our accumulated knowledge of band-level societies that human societies were generally characterized by a great deal of individual autonomy (individuality or instrumental individualism, if you like, rather than ideological individualism), cooperation and sharing, decisions made by consensus (direct democracy or the decentralization of power), and the expectation of justice when a wrong has been committed (the rule of law, first by custom). It was the mastery of these small clusters of human beings that enabled the human species to survive and spread out from Africa to Eurasia and beyond.[4] As populations grew and environments changed, other forms of social organization arose, such as tribes, autonomous villages, chiefdoms, and eventually the state. It is important to note and respect that people living in band societies, although called "primitive" or "savages" in the past, were not in any sense wild or poorly accomplished in their environments. Human beings are intelligent as a species, and as a group tend to solve problems in the same way given the same set of circumstances. The least that can be said for early humans is that they lacked the knowledge that we have access to today, but their past successes made our present existence possible.

Only in the last 12,000 years has the form and degree of social organization changed due to the rise of domestication of plants and animals. Although theories vary about the rise of domestication, most scholars agree that it happened over a long period of time, maybe hundreds of years. Human beings through their gathering and hunting practices had knowledge of how plants propagated long before they had to make use of that knowledge, and human beings do not give up a sure form of subsistence for another unless they are forced to do so. Nevertheless, without the so-called Neolithic Revolution, it is doubtful that civilizations would have developed at all.

Only in the last 6,000 years have human beings congregated in great numbers such that cities and, subsequently, civilizations came into being. This crucial shift in human social organization occurred primarily because of the acquisition of new knowledge, technology, and environmental changes that made the implementation of that

knowledge necessary. Subsequently, human populations increased, leading to a greater specialization of labor and subsequently of knowledge and to the kinds of societies we live in today. Sociality made all of this possible.

Among modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*), knowledge has spread like wildfire across the human landscape. This is traced by archaeologists through the spread of toolmaking techniques, of trade goods across great distances, and of ideas and culture among spatially separate populations. Early gatherers and hunters shared information all the time about the location and nature of plants and the tracks of animals ripe for hunting. The human mind excels at the acquisition of knowledge, but the amount of knowledge and its use by people are magnified through human association. Individual rational faculties are enhanced by human social existence. The two are intricately and irrevocably linked.[5]

Sociality and Psychological Development

Individuals, as a rule, require other individuals in order to live and to realize fully their human beingness. It takes human beings to nourish, nurture, and teach new humans how to become human. Until a new human being can operate on its own, it requires assistance from other humans—that is a metaphysical fact that would obtain even if new humans were conceived in test tubes and artificially nourished. Without continuous physical contact with other human beings, new humans can neither survive nor realize their human potential. The physical separateness of individual human beings, therefore, does not negate the fact that humans are innately social. All human beings live in and develop in society. Contact with other human beings is *a developmental necessity*. This characteristic of human beings is called *sociality*. Sociality is a primary attribute of human nature. Sociality structures all human relations, beginning with *identity*.

Identity, besides just being a way of thinking about oneself, is *a locating device that tells each of us where that self stands with regard to everyone else in the group*, be that group the family, the community, or the larger society. Although one can find identity defined in many different ways, my reason for looking at identity as a locating device is that it acknowledges that the individual stands among others and that one's ties to the human community are bound up with one's sense of self.

Identity both distinguishes an individual from other members and includes the individual as a member of the group. Identity is not just about how one sees one's self, for it is impossible to develop a sense of the self as distinguished from the rest of existence without the experience of other people. To differentiate oneself, one must have others to differentiate from. Identity-acquisition is a process by which the self arises, and that self is always within a social context, no matter how highly attenuated.

There are two other processes that all human beings go through as well. These are both tied to identity, to each other, and to the development of the rational faculty: *socialization* and *enculturation*. Socialization is *the process by which we learn about our society and our place in it*. These are things we learn as we grow up about the rules by which society operates, our place in the general social scheme, and the nature of human relationships. Enculturation is *the process of acquiring one's own culture*. *Culture*, as anthropologically defined, is *a set of shared understandings* that can be roughly categorized into three groups: descriptive (beliefs), procedural (actions), and normative (values) (see Swartz and Jordan 1976, 46). The process is largely one of learning and internalizing the understandings that constitute the particular culture into which we are born. This is one of the ways in which we benefit from the accumulated knowledge of the group and acquire our place within it.

Thus, individuals and their rational faculties are the product of multiple processes that eventually result in a self that each of us recognizes as himself or herself. However, within each self, there is likely to be considerable tension among all of the forces encountered. Sociality is not in conflict with individuality, but it is part and parcel of every individual and must be acknowledged. Although human beings are flexible in their ability to balance sociality and individuality in everyday life, these are generally complements, and either extreme tends to generate pathology. Given individuals may feel the pull between their own desires and the pressure of social obligations, even in societies that value the collective more than the individual. Groups within a given society may be in conflict over the relative balance between the individual and society as a whole. A variety of factors within a changing physical and social environment more or less guarantee that having a self is problematic (see, for example, Mageo

1995 and 2002).

These conflicts also exist because our knowledge of our own natures and our knowledge of the world is imperfect. We must learn about human nature just as we must learn about the rest of nature. What people have learned already (including erroneous knowledge) is passed along to each of us through the processes of enculturation and socialization, but the discovery of new knowledge, a change in the environment, or a disparity between individual experience and these ideas can cause conflicts as well. These conflicts can only be resolved through learning. All of these processes are constantly being negotiated within and between individuals. Nothing about human nature is known automatically, so while human beings act according to their natures, one aspect of this nature is the necessity to learn and the ability to correct past errors in the light of new knowledge. The discovery of new knowledge occurs through individuals, but it cannot be verified or integrated without the social context.

All of these processes—identity formation, socialization, and enculturation—make us into the distinct individuals we are and members of the societies into which we are born. We are tied to one another through our identities, our social statuses, and our cultures. Because these features arise from our common human nature, they are present in every human society without exception and are at the base of the systems of social relations that characterize every domain of human action.

The Nine Domains of Human Action and the Origin of Social Structure

Those areas in which all human beings must act can be called the *domains of human action*.[6] They are nine in number: the social, the economic, the political, the legal, the educational, the medical, the spiritual, the artistic, and the sport. These domains of human action are the basis of all social structures and the institutions that characterize them. These nine domains and their concomitant structures are *relational entities*; that is, they are structured by the regular relationships among people in that domain of action. They are universal, always present in every society, varying only in specific detail but not in their general existence. Taken together with the physical environments in which they occur, they constitute the social system known as *society*.

Rand tended to favor the economic, political, and legal domains, almost giving them equivalence. This emphasis among contemporary philosophers and social scientists is not unusual, but it also ignores the way in which these domains fit within the other domains of human action and how they work together. It also illustrates that an economic system, a legal system, and a political system are not equivalents, as supposed by some, such as anarcho-capitalists. Therefore, politics and law cannot be taken over by the economic domain. But Rand makes a similar error when, while standing on one foot, she described the Objectivist politics as consisting of "Capitalism."[7]

Although they are described here as separate domains that are analytically distinct, at the band level of organization they are largely undifferentiated. As human society evolves—that is, as social structures that arise from these domains become more and more complex—these domains separate out from one another, become distinct, and give rise to their own sets of institutions even as they are reintegrated into the whole. They become more clearly visible, operate more distinctly, and have their own rules and relational forms. Let us explore the domains of human action one by one.

The Social Domain

The social domain involves primary relationships among the people in a society. At the band level, these consist of family relationships brought about through sexual liaisons (formally called marriages). Families include people linked biologically and people linked through the sanctioned liaisons. Families constitute a social universal—they exist in every society, although their forms vary, and the way in which people relate to one another and the rules by which they associate vary. But even this variation is limited. Anthropologists have identified six kinds of basic kinship systems, but the number might be multiplied because of the variations on these six themes.[8] Families are often categorized by the type of descent (bilateral or unilineal), where the married couple resides after marriage (locality), and how many spouses a given individual has (polygyny, monogamy, polyandry).

As the size of the group expands, relationships become more elaborate. Families acknowledge a wider range of relatives within

their fold, friendships flourish, and new levels of association appear that are not based on kinship, and even non-familial relationships are acknowledged and formalized. People form recreational clubs, professional associations, and fraternal and sororal organizations, to mention only a few. It is interesting to note that, in his concern over individualism, French observer Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* ([1840] 2000) noted the role of free institutions and "self-interest rightly understood."[9] All of these relationships and their interrelationships constitute the social domain of human action.

The Economic Domain

The economic domain consists of all subsistence activities and the exchanges among people that arise from them. All human beings must acquire water, food, shelter, and other items to assure their survival. Because human beings are social beings, much of what is gathered from the environment or hunted is shared. Indeed, food sharing is one of the characteristics that distinguish human beings from other primates. The particular way in which food is shared varies from one group to the next, and the conditions under which food is shared may also vary, but there are always rules for doing so. They tend to be customary rather than coercive.

Thus, exchange exists from the beginning of human experience, whether we speak of forms of gift giving, reciprocity, barter, or of market exchange. As societies grow more complex, especially after the domestication of plants and animals, exchanges become more elaborate due to the existence of surpluses and the specialization of labor and knowledge. Local markets form and expand, long distance trade becomes a reality, and eventually the market system as we know it today arises. The market system is a naturally occurring phenomenon of structural complexity in the economic domain, the study of which gives rise to an understanding of the principles by which it operates. So was the science of economics born. A market system is a vital part of a complex social structure associated with human survival. Because the economic domain is crucial to human survival, people often try to control it, so that it is often linked to or hampered by activities that go on in the political domain.

The Political Domain

The political domain consists of the exercise of power. All human beings have the ability to act, and action is the source of power. Individuals must make decisions; therefore, power is a part of everyday life. But in speaking of power, most social scientists seem to have in mind the ability to affect other people's power, or the ability to get other people to act in a specific way. Power can be exercised voluntarily, or it can be imposed through the use of force. At the band level, power is dispersed among individuals. There is a great deal of autonomy, meaning that individuals make decisions for themselves, or they discuss a problem among themselves and reach a consensus. Thus, band-level decision-making tends to operate as a direct democracy or a system of decentralized power in which each individual acts freely.[10] In the event of disagreement, individuals are free to leave and operate elsewhere in a different manner.

However, as groups grow in size, consensus decision-making becomes more and more difficult, and more representative modes of operation arise in which families within the larger group are represented by a member or members who will make decisions on behalf of the group—representative democracy. These representative forms will vary a great deal across environments. When the shift is made from egalitarian forms of society (bands and tribes and autonomous villages) to more stratified forms (chiefdoms and states), then leaders emerge and attempt to control the resources of the group. In this way, the political and economic domains become connected in a way they were not before. However, because this connection between the political and the economic (political economy) arises with the rise of political complexity (chiefdoms and states), we tend to take for granted that these two realms were always connected and that such a connection is inevitable. Much of recent history has witnessed attempts both to separate state and economy and to reinforce the connection.

The Legal Domain

The legal domain defines which actions are sanctioned by the group as a whole and which are not. Positive sanctions are rewarded, while negative sanctions are punished. In the beginning, sanctions are customary or informal. They are discovered and implemented

through trial and error, but they arise from a sense of what is just for individuals living within the group. Thus, the initial concern of human beings with social justice—that element of rules that attempts to reconcile the interests and actions of one individual with that of the other individuals within the group—results in attempts to define for everyone what may and may not be done and what actions are to be taken when sanctions are violated.

Judgments can be made by individuals, or by the entire group sitting in judgment of an individual, or by individuals within the group designated as judges or councils to render such judgments. Law arises quite early in human societies and predates the rise of states. As societies become more complex in their organizations—as populations grow and relationships change—this domain develops more formalized ways of establishing sanctions and rendering judgments, ultimately resulting in highly developed legal institutions. Like politics and economics, politics and law tend to be confounded, although they began as separate domains that became entangled with the rise of stratification and complexity. One outgrowth of the history of the state is the discovery and implementation of individual rights (negative rights), noncontradictory ways of reconciling the interests of all individuals in a single society.

The Educational Domain

The educational domain consists of passing on knowledge from one generation to the next. This knowledge can consist of basic survival strategies—how to recognize edible plants, how to track animals, how to use tools, the rules for group living, and the mastery of specialized knowledge (how to read star columns in order to navigate among islands in the Pacific or how to use a sextant). As such, it is part and parcel of all other domains but eventually produces its own institutions for the specialized teaching and development of knowledge. People may initially learn through imitation, as most children do, and then through apprenticeship to some specialist. Eventually, particular skills may require specific learning environments in a group setting, and formal schools emerge. In every society, people must pass on their knowledge to new members. Much of the collected wisdom is passed on in the form of culture. But there is much that must be formally taught, whether it be how to make fire,

fashion a digging or hunting tool, prepare a meal, take care of a child, or to read, write, and calculate.

The Medical Domain

The medical domain consists of healing practices and is often indistinguishable from the spiritual domain at first. In the course of their interaction with the natural world, people discovered plants that had curative effects or rituals that seemed to have an effect on the outcome of illnesses. Also, most people in any group have a rudimentary knowledge of treatments for everyday occurrences, such as cuts or snake bites or nausea. However, more mysterious afflictions, such as communicable disease epidemics (especially when previously not encountered) can be mistaken for sorcery or attributed to some supernatural cause, meaning that the remedy is often itself supernatural. Hence, there is an overlap between healing practices and spiritual rituals. These practices eventually become formalized and specific roles are assigned to those who master them. They might be shamans, doctors, medicine men, midwives, dieticians—all professions recognized through the specialized knowledge that these healing practitioners develop.

The Spiritual Domain

The spiritual domain consists of the desire for transcendence of everyday feelings and life to the more exalted feelings of connection with the natural world or universe through one's own experience. Spirituality is a human universal that people express in a variety of ways. Although anthropologists and others tend to speak of "religion," I think that "spirituality" is a more neutral term that encompasses all of the manifestations of this need for transcendence. Not only are there many different kinds of religion (from animism to animatism to the worship of one or more deities), but sometimes this need for transcendence is decidedly secular rather than religious, as when people declare devotions to political ideologies or to other causes with such passion that they take on the nature of a crusade.

The pursuit of some "higher" purpose seems endemic to human life, whether it is manifested by a hunter-gatherer living in the Kalahari desert, pilgrims traveling to worship at a shrine, a family gathering around the altars to pay respect to their ancestors, or a

group of people trying to convince others that capitalism is the superior system under which to live, or another group affirming the righteousness of socialism. It is the passion with which people pursue these ideas and ends, the common pattern of their participation, and the nature of their devotion that characterizes them all as part of the spiritual domain.

The Artistic Domain

The artistic domain consists of those expressive arts that result in music (vocal and instrumental), storytelling (poetry and prose), drawing, painting, sculpture, and dance. All of these abilities are present in human societies at all levels of human social organization. Artistic expression arises from our nature as human beings, and we have evidence of art produced as long ago as 60,000 years.[11] The artistic domain, like all domains, becomes more complex as societies evolve and new technologies appear, and eventually artistic institutions emerge in their own right. Whether we are talking about Icelandic epics, Australian rock drawings, Italian opera, the hunting dances of the !Kung San, a performance of the New York Philharmonic, the turquoise jewelry of the Navaho, the music of a Dixieland band, or a parent telling a child a fairytale before bed, artistic expression is pervasive.

The Sporting Domain

The creation of games, be they intellectual or physical, for the purpose of the challenge, for fun, or for competition, constitutes sport. Sport seems to arise from the necessity of using one's mind and body whether or not the end is a practical one or not. Games and sports operate by rules and are defined by these in much the same way as the other domains of human action. Although sport may begin as play, as societies become more complex, sport takes on more significance and gives rise to institutions such as the NFL, the NHL, and the NBA, as well as to many amateur organizations. The Olympics, for example, brings together whole nations, as do poker tournaments, and chess matches. In other words, sport becomes highly differentiated from other activities in other domains and develops into an elaborated structure that is integrated into the society as a whole.

These nine domains of human action are the basis of all social structures that eventually arise as differentiation and integration take place in societies. These nine domains are the building blocks of human society.

How Social Structures Operate: Bailey's Model[12]

Understanding social structures[13] and their function in human life is imperative if we want to understand the world with which human beings must contend. Society not only constitutes survival and companionship but provides synergistic benefits that accumulate through the sharing of knowledge and action. A *social structure* as defined here (and derived from F. G. Bailey's political model discussed below) is *a set of normative and pragmatic rules associated with a particular domain of human action*. These "rules" define the nature of the domain, the actors within that domain, the kinds of actions that can be taken, and the boundaries of the domain. A *social system*, then, consists of the social structure(s) plus the environment outside of that structure, which can consist of other structures or elements in the physical environment, or parties not involved in the structure in question. Changes in the environment often lead to changes in the social structure(s), which translates into changes in the normative and pragmatic rules that constitute the structure.

A concern with Social Structure early in the history of anthropology left us with the dilemma of explaining how individual human action could exist alongside it. In other words, if such social structures were imperatives because of our common human nature, how could we explain when they did not seem to work effectively or even fell apart? This problem of structure and action consumed anthropologists for some time until the rise of action theory and the specific contribution of Bailey to the study of politics.

A model for the way in which social structures operate can be found in Bailey's *Stratagem and Spoils* (2001a) in which he provides a model of politics that not only allows us to compare political structures and systems across societies but also provides a template for understanding how *all* structures within a society operate, and how their fate is tied to human nature, human learning, and human free will. Bailey pretty much reconciled the problem of structure and agency.[14]

By defining a structure as a particular set of normative and pragmatic rules, Bailey demonstrated how human agents abide by, invent, manipulate, and even break the rules. His approach also allows us to define the nature of change. Normative rules represent the basic values by which people operate in a given domain of human action. These rules may be formal (written down) and/or informal, but they constitute the basic understandings upon which the structure is based. Pragmatic rules, also part of the structure, are those rules necessary in order for actions to take place. Pragmatic rules can be in accord with the normative rules or not, but they are deemed necessary in order for actions to be taken by individuals. Pragmatic rules can be stretched and can proliferate any time a new resource is discovered or a clever political entrepreneur invents a new way of manipulating the structure, thus undermining the normative rules and/or creating the need to develop new normative rules to accord with the new environment created by the newly discovered resource.

Most political contests take place within a single political structure. There are multiple teams, the leadership and membership of which are defined by the normative rules, rules for competing, and so on. However, when the people or actors within a group cannot agree on the rules, competing political structures sometimes emerge and a battle ensues to see which will become the accepted structure (civil wars constitute an example of competing political structures).

Using Bailey's model for politics, we can view any social structure as a set of rules that define the relationships among members and the rules by which they operate within that domain. By positing the existence of both normative rules and pragmatic rules—rules based on values that are fixed and rules based on actions, which are not—Bailey has resolved the problem of structure and agency, structure being the more or less permanent relational entity established by the rules and agency the ability of individuals to act in accordance with or in violation of the rules.[15] Structure itself arises from sociality, the basic need to live among human beings, and agency arises from our individuality and is responsible for both the discovery and invention of rules and the enacting and changing of them. All kinds of social actions can, thus, be accounted for with Bailey's model.[16]

Virtually all actions taken within a given domain have specific consequences, depending on how well understood the principles

guiding actions in that domain are. Thus, each domain develops into a social structure that, in turn, operates on principles that have to be discovered and interpreted as rules for acting within that structure. People discover these principles through trial and error and the accumulation of knowledge. Thus, human nature is the basis of society and the social structures it comprises, but the principles on which it operates must be discovered. Individuals sustain, challenge, change, and even destroy these structures through their actions, and ignorance, individually and combined.

Part of the role of the rational faculty is to help individuals figure out what the proper rules are for living together and what principles operate within societies. But all of this must be *learned*; it is not self-evident. This brings us back to the role of knowledge in society and its relationship to the rational faculty.

Knowledge, Individuality, and Sociality

As a great champion of the individual, Rand has often idealized "man," and her fictional heroes are men of great ability and valor. In fact, Rand attributes the creation of all knowledge to the individual. This is both right and wrong. First of all, while individual minds (alone or in concert) produce new knowledge, it is also true that knowledge in general is distributed among individuals and does not reside in the head of any one individual due to the specialization of labor within complex societies. Secondly, the discovery of new knowledge is sometimes (more and more) a team effort, but the validation of new knowledge is necessarily a social project. Third, sociality itself produces a synergistic effect in which we all benefit from sharing knowledge that others possess even though we do not possess it ourselves. It is this sharing of knowledge that makes civilization possible. Let us examine these points one at a time.

In band-level societies where there was very little division of labor and sometimes a meager sexual division of labor, any man and woman could pretty much replicate the knowledge that every other man and woman possessed. This had nothing to do with the intelligence of people living in band societies (whom we often hear referred to as "primitive" or "savages"). All human beings possess intelligence—it is a hallmark of being human. There was simply less knowledge available, and it was passed on from one generation of individuals to

the next. So, for example, all women eventually possessed the knowledge necessary to gather the fruits and vegetables with which to feed their families (and this generally constitutes 60–80% of the calories consumed in these societies) and the knowledge to build their houses, and all men possessed the knowledge necessary to hunt for animals and to make arrows or spears and the poisons that were applied to them. In many societies, both women and men gathered and hunted. But whatever knowledge was necessary to survive in these societies, that knowledge was generally shared by all. Even though people living in this fashion often discovered new principles and made innovations in the course of their lives, the volume of knowledge possessed by people living in band societies was smaller because of the small population sizes and because of the larger amount of land necessary to perform subsistence activities.

It was the lower quantity of knowledge that made it possible for all individuals to possess knowledge equally, and this lent itself to individual autonomy. One of the bases of autonomy in these societies was the ability of any man or woman to survive based on the knowledge that they possessed. People who lived in band societies often moved among a number of different groups. In spite of the fact that such people possessed knowledge, cooperation resulted in psychic well being and often material well being when the luck of one group of hunters was better than that of another group of hunters. Access to resources was equally available to all because these resources were stored in nature. But the acquisition of these resources still depended on skill and experience, which varied among individuals. Sharing was a way of distributing these skills and experience among all members of the group, thus enhancing the survival of every individual. So, even with a lower overall quantity of knowledge and complete access to resources available, sharing and cooperation were operative at the band level due to the benefits of this natural sociality of humans.

As society evolved—that is, as societies became more complex with the growth of populations, knowledge, and specialization of labor—individuals ceased to possess all of the knowledge available to them or even all of the skills necessary to survive within the new social environments. People became more interdependent precisely because knowledge was distributed among them. No longer could

any man and woman replicate the society as a whole—not after specialization of labor and, therefore, knowledge reached a higher level. This situation enhanced the need for cooperation and sharing of knowledge even more than in a band society. Individuals benefitted from people they may not have even known. It was not necessary for any individual to understand automotive mechanics to benefit from the existence of automobiles; it was not necessary for any individual to possess knowledge of medicine to receive cures for illnesses; it was not necessary for any individual to understand agriculture in order to get food to eat. The specialization of labor and its concomitant specialization of knowledge allowed for the production of a greater quantity of knowledge, and sociality allowed access to this knowledge by other individuals within the society.

The trick was learning the best way to organize societies so that everyone benefits. This, as we all know, has been very problematic, for as societies evolved—as civilizations arose—the autonomy, equality, and justice of the band societies gradually disappeared. States arose, and their leaders often became despotic and warlike. Social stratification led to status differences and differential access to resources—relative material equality gave way to great disparities in wealth and poverty that linger to this day. Even greater disparities in power arose, and warfare escalated beyond local skirmishes to battles that covered great geographical distances as one group of people attempted to conquer another. In the course of all of this human activity, human beings learned from their experiences and began to learn what worked and what did not, often tragically and often over a long period of time. But almost always in the midst of the chaos created by the states, the dream and desire for liberty and for the autonomy, equality, and justice that people had once known kept making appearances across the landscape of human endeavor.

Solving this problem requires that we understand the nature of the reality with which we are dealing. Some have approached the problem by trying to rearrange economic systems so that resources are equally distributed by central authorities. This, however, has worked very poorly. Others have posited liberty for the producers, but because some have acquired the means of production prior to this, there is unequal distribution at the outset, and there is a tendency for this inequality to persist as producers align themselves with politicians.

The fate of individuals very much depends on how systems of politics, law, and economics are set up with relation to one another and how individuals within a society will be treated.

The problem seems to lie in a lack of understanding of the relationship between individual freedom and structural necessity or principle, and between the tendency to overemphasize either sociality or individuality instead of seeing them as complementary attributes within all human beings. The discovery (or recovery) of individual rights helped to create the idea of a noncontradictory system of rights that actually made possible the beginnings of a return to autonomy, equality, and justice but at a more complex level of social organization. By encouraging more liberty, this sort of system also makes possible the free flow of knowledge within the society and, thus, benefits more people.

F. A. Hayek, in his paper, "The Use of Knowledge in Society" ([1945] 1980, 77–78) has pointed out that

> The peculiar character of the problem of a rational economic order is determined precisely by the fact that the knowledge of the circumstances of which we must make use never exists in concentrated or integrated form but solely as the dispersed bits of incomplete and frequently contradictory knowledge which all the separate individuals possess. The economic problem of society is thus not merely a problem of how to allocate "given" resources. . . . It is rather a problem of how to secure the best use of resources known to any of the members of society, for ends whose relative importance only these individuals know. Or, to put it briefly, it is a problem of the utilization of knowledge which is not given to anyone in its totality.

This valuable insight provides justification for decentralizing economic planning—for allowing individuals or businesses to make their own decisions based on the knowledge of their particular circumstances. Localized knowledge, in most cases, is generally more accurate than centralized knowledge. And, if mistakes are made, the effects are localized rather than distributed among everyone.

However, there is another implication to this insight about the

distribution of knowledge, for while within the economic domain of human action the conclusion is that individualized or localized decision-making is the best approach, *it also points to the limitations of the individual and provides justification for free human association in order to enhance human sociality*. In other words, it is precisely because individual human knowledge is limited that association with other human beings (albeit voluntary association) is necessary in order for that knowledge to be fully beneficial, not just to its possessors but to others as well. This synergistic effect made possible by sociality makes civilization possible.

No one person has all of the knowledge necessary to make all of the important decisions that individuals face in their lives. This fact has a number of important implications. First of all, this fact reinforces the need for people to connect with one another and share knowledge from which they will all benefit much more than if they tried to operate in isolation. But without the specialization of labor that gives rise to this knowledge, civilization is not possible. Furthermore, even if all of the knowledge that humankind possesses were written down in books or stored in computers, individuals (no matter how brilliant) would not be able to take advantage of it without the cooperation of others through their labor.

In other words, no matter how brilliant John Galt was, he could not make his engine without all of the resources necessary to put that engine together—the raw materials from which the metals were made, the nuts and bolts that bound them together.[17] Howard Roark could build no skyscraper without the cooperation of others, no matter how brilliant he was, and Rearden Metal required more than Hank Rearden's brilliant mind to turn itself into rails. Again, we find that the attribute of individuality is reinforced by the attribute of sociality in a way not often remarked upon by classical liberal scholars or by Rand herself.[18]

As society evolves, the role of knowledge becomes increasingly important but knowledge itself increases in volume, becomes more specialized, and less and less the province of any single individual. While certain brilliant individuals have, without question, come up with ideas that have benefitted the rest of us, they could not have implemented these ideas without the rest of us. This is simply a fact of nature. Human beings are both individual and social creatures.

As mentioned earlier, human beings for most of their existence lived in small bands, which were undifferentiated in their structural aspects and egalitarian in their relationships. These people were not "savages" or "wild," for people everywhere live in societies according to rules. Nor did these people lack cognitive capacity. It was because these early peoples were able to survive by mastering their environments and solving problems and accumulating knowledge, that we, who live in large, nation-states with advanced technologies, exist today. What is significant is not some change in the cognitive capacities of human beings as societies evolved, but the change in the relationship of individuals to the available knowledge and the freedom to put that knowledge to work.

Are We Learning Yet? Implications for the Individual in Society

Whether you have a tendency to favor the individual or society, the truth is you must understand both and their relationship with one another. I have tried, in this paper, to demonstrate that individuality and sociality are complementary attributes of every human being and cannot be meaningfully separated. Rather, we need to understand how each attribute plays a part in our lives and to reconcile them whenever possible in a noncontradictory way.

Knowledge of society and how it operates is important and indispensable to a full understanding of human beings and their place within objective reality. None of what I have said about society negates the importance of the individual, but it does add knowledge of a context *that cannot be ignored* if we are to be successful in understanding human beings, their requirements for survival, and why seemingly rational arguments about individualism are really culture-bound arguments that ignore the social context within which we must operate.

Failure to understand the nature of society and the fundamental nature of sociality itself leads to a hyper-individualism in which only the individual has reality. This, in turn, leads to context-dropping in which sociality and its importance become invisible. This, in turn, leads to error. While there are times when the individual is the proper unit or level of analysis (as in the application of methodological individualism within economics, for example),[19] this does not preclude

the social nature of human life. A philosophy built on the denial of some aspect of objective reality cannot then legitimately claim allegiance to that same reality. In fact, the connection between the individual and the social helps to explain why humans must act on principle in the realm of the social just as they do in the realm of the physical world.

Notes

1. See Sciabarra 1995, 267–70, the section "The Individual and Society," for a detailed discussion and analysis of Rand's viewpoint. Also see Rand 1988, 462–66, for a number of entries about society and social systems.

2. See, for example, Hayek 1991, on the nature of the social sciences as they differ from the natural sciences and especially his commentary on the work of Auguste Comte.

3. See Hayek [1945] 1980. Thomas Sowell elaborated on the role of knowledge in society in his *Knowledge and Decisions* (1996).

4. Human life began in Africa roughly 3.5 to 4 million years ago with the appearance of the Australopithecines, one branch of which later developed into the *Homo* genus, which eventually evolved into *Homo sapiens sapiens*, modern humans (us). The emergence of modern humans is relatively recent, and genetic studies indicated that it occurred somewhere between 250,000 and 75,000 years ago. Thus, there has been little chance for many substantial differences to evolve among people. For the most part, the differences we can see are superficial—that is, they developed rather quickly in relation to environmental adaptation and are the kinds of changes that can occur between a generation or two. Even physical differences such as the shape of skulls can change in a single generation. See any introductory anthropology textbook for more complete explanations of human evolution. See biological anthropology textbooks for more detailed treatment of the same.

5. For example, Christopher Stringer and Robin McKie have proposed that Neanderthals (*Homo sapiens neandertalensis*) may have been less successful than modern humans because of a lack of sociality of modern human dimensions. Some recent evidence suggests that Neanderthals did not exploit many of the resources in their environments, lived in very small groups, etc. See Stringer and McKie 1996, 85–114.

6. American anthropologists generally refer to these as cultural domains. However, this terminology obscures the fact that the origins of these domains lie in their derivation from human nature and the requirements of human survival. These domains are universal—they exist in every human society.

7. This answer was presumably given at a gathering of Random House salespeople shortly after the publication of *Atlas Shrugged*, when she was asked to describe her philosophy while standing on one foot. It has now reached the status of legend.

8. These are the Crow, Eskimo, Hawaiian, Iroquois, Omaha, and Sudanese systems, and a description of them can be found in any introductory anthropology textbook. For variations, one would have to read specific ethnographies, which provide more elaborate details about kinship systems.

9. See Tocqueville [1840] 2000, "How Americans Combat the Effects of Individualism with Free Institutions" (485–88) and "How the Americans Combat Individualism by the Principle of Self-Interest Rightly Understood" (500–3). Tocqueville is acknowledging the role of the social in American life in these passages and in much of what he explores in Volume II of this national character study.

10. Scholars often believe that giving a phenomenon a name constitutes the creation of the concept that stands for that phenomenon. However, the discovery and recognition of a phenomenon is not the same as creating that phenomenon. It is clear that what we call democracy, whether direct or representative, existed in practice long before the rise of Greek city-states.

11. Rand (1969, 17) acknowledged this when she said that "art is of passionately intense importance and profoundly *personal* concern to most men—and it has existed in every known civilization, accompanying man's steps from the early hours of his prehistorical dawn, earlier than the birth of written language."

12. See Bailey 2001a; 2001b. Bailey's other books examining aspects of leadership and individualism include *Humbuggery and Manipulation* (1988) and *The Kingdom of Individuals* (1993).

13. I will use the singular and capitalized term, "Social Structure," to refer to the entire structural framework of a society. I will use the singular lower case term "social structure" to refer to any of the structures arising from one of the domains of human action.

14. Bailey makes no claims about human nature in *Stratagems and Spoils*. However, its relationship to social structure is implicit.

15. The problem of structure and agency constituted a particularly thorny problem for anthropologists in that if they described social structures, they often lost sight of the individuals who acted within them. If they concentrated on the actions of individuals, they did not fully account for the existence of social structures. This was a particular problem in the writing of ethnographies but also in the theoretical assumptions drawn from the ways in which social systems were described. An emphasis on structure left the impression that individuals were mere automatons acted upon by the structure or some other mysterious force. Hence, the problem of structure and agency. Bailey's approach to politics accounts for both the constitution of the structure by humans through identifiable rules of operation and the actions of individuals that operate within it and, sometimes, against it by breaking the rules. Bailey's description of change in terms of the relationship between normative and pragmatic rules is especially useful in seeing strengths and weaknesses in political structures and the environmental elements that affect them. See Bailey 2001a, for a full account of his model of politics.

16. See also Bailey 2001b, which augments Bailey's original model with modern insights.

17. One of the best explanations of this point can be found in Read 1958.

18. But see Pufendorf [1691] 2003 and Hutcheson [1730] 2006.

19. Methodological individualism is an approach to studying the social sciences based on the consideration of individual action. It is generally associated with classical liberal economics but also with Weberian sociology and other schools of thought. For a detailed look at the topic see Udehn 2001. This book contains chapters on the Austrian School of Economics as well as on Karl Popper's use of the

approach.

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