

JIRÍ KOLAJA

TIME AND SOCIAL SYSTEM

State University of New York

Before we start our discussion, let us refer to nuclear physics, in which tangibility and direct observability of phenomena has been abandoned. This indicates that sometimes somewhat less tangible and less observable social phenomena cannot be criticized as possessing less phenomenal reality than physical phenomena.

By way of introduction, for example, we could refer to Simmel, Weber and, in particular, to Durkheim.¹ Certainly Durkheim tackled the onto logical problem of society most vigorously. Since an individual was defined as transcending himself,² and social fact was independent of individual manifestations,³ what we call social fact was recognizable through its effect. Because of this, society became the most powerful combination of physical and moral forces.⁴ Durkheim was moving toward a metaphysical notion of society. His unique achievement is, however, that he buttressed at least somewhat with data his thesis that the social was independent of individual manifestation.

Social phenomena, as is well known, can be and have been classified in several different schemes of categories. To avoid a further classification, we would like to consider only two categories: first, social interactions appear as having no order but a further observation discloses that persons follow interactions according to different time orders. Secondly, there are phenomena of which persons are not aware which are eventually pointed out by an analyst, e. g. Keynes' proposition that saving is good for individual persons but could be detrimental to society under certain conditions. Both our examples are in fact at the border between social phenomena and categories pointed out by an analyst. Possibly most theories of emergence could be concretized by the notion of new information conceived as an amount of energy.

We start with a proposition that social phenomena involving an individual person or a small group of persons tend to be different in time from phenomena

¹ Concerning Georg Simmel see, for example, p. 9, p. 40 and p. 258 in Kurt H. Wolff, ed. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, Glencoe, Ill., 1950. On Weber see Max Weber: *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, Glencoe, Ill., 1964, paper-back, p. 118.

² Emile Durkheim: *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Glencoe, Ill., no year, p. 16.

³ Emile Durkheim: *The Rules of Sociological Method*, Glencoe, Ill., 1958, p. 13.

⁴ Emile Durkheim: *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, p. 446.

covering a larger number of persons who cannot be directly observed as a whole. To clarify our analysis, Table 1 should be helpful.

Table 1

Time and Space Differentiated by
One and Collective

| | | Time | |
|-------|----------------------|----------|----------------|
| | | Presence | Future or Past |
| Space | Collective | 1 | 2 |
| | One or a few persons | 3 | 4 |

Though one could refer e. g. to Kant in the above table, we have in mind social space defined by persons in it, and social time perceived likewise by persons. Since persons within a humanly limited space can see only a limited number of people, by analogy we propose that some transcendence of present time is realized by moving in our imagination to past or future times. Then we get both space and time that are removed from our direct attendance. In reference to table 1, we propose that cells 3 and 2 are likely to occur. The problematic is cell 2 since we maintain that inability to observe a large group directly by analogy brings about tendencies to conceive of large groups not exactly in present time unless it is so specified. One should not fail to underline that we speak here of tendencies.

In table 1 cell 1 provides for cross-classification of collective in present time, and cell 4 for one person or small group of persons to be thought of in past or future times. However, since a large collective tends to be conceived of beyond present time, we should stress that large collectives can be conceived in the present time if it is so specified.

Having introduced space and time dimensions in Table 1 we proceed now to the major point of this short paper: we propose that theories of relationship between one person and a collective have been mostly developed in spatial concepts and not much along a temporal dimension. To facilitate understanding we present Table 2 where time and space is differentiated both into Specific and General.

Note that cell 1 and cell 4 in which general is combined with specific lend a temporal explanation. If cell 4 is a specific action carried out in terms of justice or other values that transcend a person's immediate time, then particular activities gain a collective significance. In what way is the temporal dimension of collective stressed? Contrary to G. H. Mead whose *generalized other* was conceived in neither temporal nor spatial terms, collective identification is best developed by a shifting time reference.⁵ Disregarding personal immediate

⁵ In fact Mead discusses neither spatial nor temporal dimensions of the Generalized Other. See George H. Mead: *Mind, Self & Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. University of Chicago Press, 1948, pp. 152-164.

Table 2

Time and Space Differentiated by
Specific and General

| | | Time | |
|-------|----------|----------|---------|
| | | Specific | General |
| Space | General | 1 | 2 |
| | Specific | 3 | 4 |

satisfaction, transcending a stimulus-response brings about man's "Spiritualization". Socialization with respect to the ability to postpone immediate gratification, means primarily manipulation of time. Generally, to abstract and to generalize takes man out of the current flow of time. Generalization in space is an analogy to transcendence in time.

Before concluding our paper, we should introduce one more point concerning the isolation a person can experience in a social group or community. It appears to our reasoning that persons suffer not isolation but rather oversocialization. It means that a person who is socially quite normal, might reach the point where he desires to have temporary social distance from other persons. But this distance is, in fact, a sign of social maturity that indicates a higher degree of socialization. In our line of thinking Durkheim's mechanic and organic solidarities in fact never disappear in persons. We conceive of them to appear in the same persons on different occasions. A socialized person cannot only practice both solidarities occasionally but he can also operate within several time schedules. This helps him to develop his identity and to design for himself more or less autonomous courses of action. The ability to learn how to manipulate different times makes man genuinely social.

Let us conclude by reflecting on the theoretical proposition made in this short presentation. We should stress first that social is defined by images we carry in our heads. Images occur in a particular population at particular times and spaces. We have stressed that time should obtain a greater recognition in sociological theory that has been mostly concerned with spatial dimension. It was stressed that a person develops most his collective ego if he transcends himself in time. In conclusion we have also stressed that Durkheim's mechanic and organic solidarities continue to exist in socialized persons, and that a temporary interaction distance can be in fact a stronger and more mature sociability.

ČAS A SOCIÁLNÍ SYSTÉM

Sociálně je možno definovat jako obrazy v naší mysli, které má dané obyvatelstvo v daném prostoru a v daném čase. Sociologická teorie, která se dosud převážně zajímala o rozměry prostorové, by měla více zdůrazňovat čas. Jednotlivec nejvíce rozvíjí své já, jestliže sebe překračuje v čase. V socializovaných individuích existují mechanická a organická solidarita vedle sebe a dočasná distance jednotlivce od interakce se sociální skupinou nebo společenstvím může být silnější a vyzrálejší solidaritou.

