Classification of Relations Between Individual Partners

(Excerpt from chapter "Relations Between Individual Partners" of an unfinished book on Social Relations) source: Florian Znaniecki Poznan Archive, Faculty of Sociology, Adam Mickiewicz University,

The primary source of social relations, as we have seen, is the interest which witnesses manifest in regulating the interaction between social agents; and the relation becomes constituted when the agents themselves take up this regulative function of witnesses, each with regard to his own and his partner's conduct. It may be presumed, therefore, that when a self-regulated relation is not copied from a ready model, but emerges out of unregulated interaction, its standards will be derived from those judgments of right and wrong which witnesses have applied to the behavior of the agents.

Whether the witnesses of social interaction are interested in the agents for utilitarian or specifically social reasons, their attempt to control this interaction presupposes that they value both of them positively: if they value both negatively, they do not try to regulate their mutual conduct; if they value one positively and the other negatively, they tend to join the first against the second. This is why attempts of witnesses to regulate the interaction of other people contain the demand that these people do some friendly actions and refrain from some hostile actions toward each other - which is the very essence of all social relations.

Social relations can therefore spontaneously originate only in human collectivities whose participants have a mutual and prevalently positive interest in one another, and where many cases of interaction find witnesses positively appreciating both agents. We find, indeed, that such is the case wherever we can observe a spontaneous development of social relations: among children, in new frontier communities, mining and lumber camps, in peasant villages as well as among suburban neighborhoods. In such collectivities, an agent who often behaves in an antagonistic or hamful way toward others in defiance of regulative interests of witnesses is apt to be sooner or later excluded from community life, for the witnesses join forces with his opponents.

Consequently, the old supposition, still occasionally revived, that regulation of social intercourse originates in coercive demands of the strongest and most masterful agents acting in their own interests is contrary to all we know about social norms; nor is there any factural evidence to support it. While domination of the strongest is a fact that frequently occurs, it never results in the creation of moral regulations that did not exist before, but at best in some modification of pre-existing regulations. Even the head of a predatory boys gang who owes his position to physical superiority and mental prowess cannot organize the gang into a solidary group unless his conduct toward every boy of the gang usually meets with the approval of some, if not all other boys.

Since the early conditions of collective life under which normatively regulated social relations first developed must have been favorable to such development, it must be presumed that these conditions involved a prevalently positive mutual valuation among a number of individuals who not only were in frequent social contact with one another, but also often played the part of witnesses to the social interaction of other individuals, and whose own interaction with others was in turn often subjected to the regulative judgments of other witnesses. These conditions would be best fulfilled in a lasting grouping of individuals bound together by life-long association which was established in childhood and continued through youth and maturity. The grouping must have been small enough to allow for mutual acquaintance and close connection between all individuals, and at the same time large enough and permanent enough to allow culture to develop, to be maintained by communication and cooperation (at least of the socio-utilitarian type), and to be preserved by a process of gradual transference from the old to the young.

In short, social relations could have appeared only within social collectivites united both by kinship and by proximity, considerably larger than a "family" in the modern sense of the term and including individuals of both sexes at various age levels. Since the social continuity of successive generations, involving not only the consciousness of common origin, but actual association from childhood on, is easily and spontaneously achieved and maintained only if mothers rather than fathers are the centers of collective life, whereas a patriarchal society presupposes more complex principles of organization, we may safely accept the conjecture, lately revived and defended by Briffault with considerable talent and a vast amount of evidence,[[1]](#footnote-1) that the origin of permanently regulated social life must be sought within maternal kinship groupings.

Now, when in a grouping of such a type regulative interests emerge, these become differentiated into two distinct varieties, depending on the agents upon whom they bear: interests in social interaction among individuals on the same age level, mostly mature or approaching maturity, and interests in social interaction between mature individuals on the one hand and immature individuals, children and youth, on the other hand. Perhaps the former are earlier: it is impossible to tell. In all human collectivities we know, not excluding the lowest, not only is interaction between adults a matter of concern to other individuals of the collectivity and to all appearances normatively regulated, but also that between a child and an adult, even the child's own mother.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The difference between these two varieties of regulative interests is familiar. When interaction between adult agents is subjected to controlling influences of witnesses in a primary grouping, each of these agents is regarded as directly and independently responsible for his own conduct. Whereas in attempts to control interaction between an adult and a child, responsibility is unevenly divided: the mature individual is viewed as responsible not only for his own actions, but also for those actions of his imature interagent which are considered as due to his influence, while the responsibility of the child is limited to actions which he performs independently of the adult's influence. In other words, the witnesses presuppose that the conduct of the child is, within wider or narrower limits, dependent upon the conduct of the adult; but not *vice versa*; within these very limits regulative demands concerning the child are put to the adult, not to the child, and the adult is expected to make the child comply with them. The more immature the child seems to the witnesses and the greater its dependence upon the particular adult, the wider is this vicarious responsibility of the latter for the child's behavior toward him.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is well known, for example, that in primitive custom and law both partners in certain social relations, and even all the members of a group, may be made responsible for the conduct of one, mature or immature; thus, not only parents bear punishment for misdeeds of their children, but children are punished for the misdeeds of their parents. But this is a different and more complex problem.

When, under the influence of this regulative interest of witnesses, normative interests emerge in the agents themselves and gradually give birth to standardized social relations, we find this original difference preserved and developed in the composition and structure of these relations. There are thus two primary classes of social relations between individuals, which may be called *relations of reciprocity* and *relations of dependence*. In the former, each partner as judge and witness considers himself fully and independently responsible for his own valuations and actions, and each regards the other partner as equally responsible for his. Responsibility is reciprocal. Whereas in relations of dependence one partner as witness and judge considers himself responsible not only for his own valuations and actions, but also for some at least of the valuations and actions of the other partner, which he consequently controls in accordance with his own standards. The other partner in view of this limitation of his responsibilities, submits to the control of those valuations and actions of his for which he is not independently responsible. The first partner may be therefore called the *controlling*, the second, the *dependent* partner.

Relations of reciprocity seem very early to have become divided into two classes: relations of *homogeneity*  between individuals whose parts in the relation are regarded as essentially similar (however dissimilar they may be otherwise) and *sexual* relations. We find both classes already in the lowest societies that we know. The former are founded chiefly on continuous association between individuals who have grown and lived together, among adults, and also in a rudimentary form between youths before puberty. We call them relations of *primary solidarity*. Sexual relations as a rule begin to be binding only after puberty.

With the widening and developing of human collectivities, the moral patterns of relations of homogeneity become differentiated with regard to the objective bonds between the partners. Relations of *kinship*, with real or supposed community of origin as main bond, are distinguished from relations of *companionship* based on similar or common interests. From relations of kinship are evolved later relations of *racial* and *caste solidarity*, while companionship develops along two distinct lines: *comradeship* in the pursuit of common tasks and *neighborliness*, which gives birth to relations of *mutual charity* and relations of *equality*.

Sexual relations are subdivided into *conjugal* and *erotic relations*, the former involving joint responsibility for rearing (originally not for educating) children, the latter founded on a hedonistic bond. Further evolution of both of them is connected with the introduction of other objective bonds - economic, religious, aesthetic, intellectual - and a corresponding differentiation of duties and restrictions.

In relations of dependence between the mature and the immature, we find an early distinction conditioned by the subdivision of the immature into two age classes. The small child is bound to its elders by *protective* relations; the adolescent who will soon be initiated into adult cultural life becomes connected with some older member of the community by what may be called a *vouching* relation. Both of these forms of dependence become later extended to certain kinds of social intercourse among individuals of the older generation. Protection is given by some adults to other adults, and these protective relations between adults come to be differentiated from protective relations between adults and children. The latter acquire a character of exclusiveness and assume the specific form which may be termed *guardianship*. The former develop in two main directions. On the one hand, we find relations between a socially powerful individual and one who, though mature, is socially helpless. Examples of this class, to which the term *power relations* may be applied, are: the protection which a captor gives to his captive, a master to slave or servant, a chief to members of his retinue, an aristocrat to a commoner, a mediaeval knight to his serf, a rich man to his poor neighbor or tenant, a political boss to his adherent.

On the other hand, certain individuals may possess special capacities, inborn or acquired, in dealing with some specific problems, while others lack such capacities and are therefore subjected to various troubles and dangers. Between the former and the latter a distinct and familiar class of protective relations evolve which may be called relations of *professional dependence*. The relation between a medicine-man or priest and a person who has no magical or religious abilities or contacts is a wellknown prototype of this class; that between a physician and patient is a modern example.

Vouching relations imply that certain activities of the dependent partner have a bearing on social systems beyond the relation itself, and the vouching partner assumes vicarious responsibility for their performance. Two main subclasses develop here with the growing wealth of cultural life. In *directing* relations the controlling partner vouches for the dependent partner's present activity in a certain field by guiding his performances toward definite results. Familiar instances are the relations between a craftsman and his helper, an officer and a soldier, a head executive and his subordinate. In *educational* relations the controlling partner as educator vouches for the educand's future activity for which he prepares him, under the assumption that when the preparation is completed, the dependent partner will be able to act independently.

We give below a classificatory scheme of relations between individual partners. Relations in which one partner is an individual and the other a community or a group, and also relations between communities and groups will be classified later on.

1. Robert Briffault, *The Mothers*, 3 vols. New York, 1927. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Infanticide is not an exception, for it is everywhere regulated and usually limited by custom to a short period after birth, before the infant has acquired the character of a social being in the eyes of the community. Of course, customs are sometimes broken, but this does not mean that they do not exist. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We are not discussing now the phenomenon of shared responsibilities toward a third party. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)