

From Georg Simmel, “On the Significance of Numbers for Social Life: Introduction,” “The Isolated Individual and the Dyad,” “The Triad,” and “The Web of Group Affiliations”

“On the Significance of Numbers for Social Life”

The present studies begin by examining forms of social life, combinations and interactions among individuals. But they do so in one respect only: the bearing which the mere *number* of sociated individuals has upon these forms of social life. . . . This quantitative determination of the group, as it may be called, has a twofold function. Negatively speaking, certain developments, which are necessary or at least possible as far as the contents or conditions of life are concerned, can be realized only below or above a particular number of elements. Positively, certain other developments are imposed upon the group by certain purely quantitative modifications. Yet not even these developments emerge automatically, for they also depend on other than numerical characteristics. The decisive point, however, is that they are not the result of these characteristics alone, for they emerge only under certain numerical conditions.

The Isolated Individual and the Dyad

Isolation

The numerically simplest structures which can still be designated as social interactions occur between two elements. Nevertheless, there is an externally even simpler phenomenon that belongs among sociological categories, however paradoxical and in fact contradictory this may seem – namely, the isolated individual. . . . [T]wo phenomena are above all relevant here: isolation and freedom. The mere fact that an individual does not interact with others is, of course, not a sociological fact, but neither does it express the whole idea of isolation. For, isolation, insofar as it is important to the individual, refers by no means only to the absence of society. On the contrary, the idea involves the somehow imagined, but then rejected, existence of society. Isolation attains its unequivocal, positive significance only as society’s effect at a distance – whether as lingering-on of past relations, as anticipation of future contacts, as nostalgia, or as an intentional turning away from society. The isolated man does not suggest a being that has been the only inhabitant of the globe from the beginning. For his condition, too, is determined by sociation, even though negatively. The whole joy and the whole bitterness of isolation are only different reactions to socially experienced influences. Isolation is

interaction between two parties, one of which leaves, after exerting certain influences. The isolated individual is isolated only in reality, however; for ideally, in the mind of the other party, he continues to live and act.

A well-known psychological fact is very relevant here. The feeling of isolation is rarely as decisive and intense when one actually finds oneself physically alone, as when one is a stranger, without relations, among many physically close persons, at a "party," on a train, or in the traffic of a large city. The question whether a group favors or even permits such loneliness in its midst is an essential trait of the group structure itself. . . .

Isolation thus is a relation which is lodged within an individual but which exists between him and a certain group or group life in general. . . .

Freedom

At first glance, freedom, like isolation, seems to be the mere negation of sociation. For, while every sociation involves a tie, the free man does not form a unit with others, but is a unit by himself. . . . But, for an individual who does have relations to other individuals, freedom has a much more positive significance. For him, freedom itself is a specific relation to the environment. It is a correlative phenomenon which loses its very meaning in the absence of a counterpart. In regard to this counterpart, freedom has two aspects that are of the greatest importance for the structure of society.

(1) For social man, freedom is neither a state that exists always and can be taken for granted, nor a possession of a material substance, so to speak, that has been acquired once and all. One reason why freedom is none of these things we shall see in a moment. It should be noted that every important claim which engages the strength of the individual in a certain direction has the tendency to go on indefinitely, to appear completely autonomous. Almost all relations – of the state, the party, the family, of friendship or love – quite naturally, as it were, seem to be on an inclined plane: if they were left to themselves, they would extend their claims over the whole of man. They are, often uncannily, surrounded by an ideal halo from which the individual must explicitly mark off some reserve of forces, devotions, and interests that he has taken away from these relations. But it is not only through the extensity of claims that the egoism of every sociation threatens the freedom of the individuals engaged in it. It does so also through the relentlessness of the claim itself, which is one-tracked and monopolistic. Usually, each claim presses its rights in complete and pitiless indifference to other interests and duties, no matter whether they be in harmony or in utter incompatibility with it. It thus limits the individual's freedom as much as does the large number of the claims on him. In the face of this nature of our relations, freedom emerges as a continuous process of liberation, as a fight, not only for our independence, but also for the right, at every moment and of our own free will, to remain *dependent*. This fight must be renewed after every victory. Thus, the absence of relations, as a negative social behavior, is almost never a secure possession but an incessant release from ties which actually limit the autonomy of the individual or which ideally strive to do so. Freedom is not solipsistic existence but sociological action. It is not a condition limited to the single individual but a relationship, even though it is a relationship from the standpoint of the individual.

(2) Freedom is something quite different from rejection of relations or immunity of the individual sphere from adjacent spheres – not only in the function described, but also in its contents. This is suggested by the simple recognition of the fact that man does not only want to be free, but wants to use his freedom for some purpose. In large part,

however, this use is nothing but the domination and exploitation of other men. To the social individual, that is, the individual who lives in constant interaction with others, freedom is very often without any content and purpose if it does not permit, or even consist in, the extension of his will over others. . . .

The Dyad

. . . [The] simplest sociological formation, methodologically speaking, remains that which operates between two elements. It contains the scheme, germ, and material of innumerable more complex forms. Its sociological significance, however, by no means rests on its extensions and multiplications only. It itself is a sociation. . . .

Everyday experiences show the specific character that a relationship attains by the fact that only two elements participate in it. A common fate or enterprise, an agreement or secret between two persons, ties each of them in a very different manner than if even only three have a part in it. This is perhaps most characteristic of the secret. General experience seems to indicate that this minimum of two, with which the secret ceases to be the property of the one individual, is at the same time the maximum at which its preservation is relatively secure . . . Although, for the outsider, the group consisting of two may function as an autonomous, super-individual unit, it usually does not do so for its participants. Rather, each of the two feels himself confronted only by the other, not by a collectivity above him. The social structure here rests immediately on the one and on the other of the two, and the secession of either would destroy the whole. . . .

This dependence of the dyad upon its two individual members causes the thought of its existence to be accompanied by the thought of its termination much more closely and impressively than in any other group, where every member knows that even after his retirement or death, the group can continue to exist . . . Ideally, any large group can be immortal. This fact gives each of its members, no matter what may be his personal reaction to death, a very specific sociological feeling. A dyad, however, depends on each of its two elements alone – in its death, though not in its life: for its life, it needs *both*, but for its death, only one. This fact is bound to influence the inner attitude of the individual toward the dyad, even though not always consciously nor in the same way. It makes the dyad into a group that feels itself both endangered and irreplaceable, and thus into the real locus not only of authentic sociological tragedy, but also of sentimentalism and elegiac problems. . . .

Intimacy

The "intimate" character of certain relations seems to me to derive from the individual's inclination to consider that which distinguishes him from others, that which is individual in a qualitative sense, as the core, value, and chief matter of his existence . . . The same phenomenon can be noted in regard to groups. They, too, easily make their specific content, that is shared only by the members, not by outsiders, their center and real fulfillment. Here we have the form of intimacy.

In probably each relation, there is a mixture of ingredients that its participants contribute to it alone and to no other, and of other ingredients that are not characteristic of it exclusively, but in the same or similar fashion are shared by its members with other persons as well. The peculiar color of intimacy exists if the ingredients of the first type, or more briefly, if the "internal" side of the relation, is felt

to be essential; if its whole affective structure is based on what each of the two participants gives or shows only to the one other person and to nobody else.

The Expansion of the Dyad

The Triad Vs. the Dyad

This peculiar closeness between two is most clearly revealed if the dyad is contrasted with the triad. For among three elements, each one operates as an intermediary between the other two, exhibiting the twofold function of such an organ, which is to unite and to separate. Where three elements, A, B, C, constitute a group, there is, in addition to the direct relationship between A and B, for instance, their indirect one, which is derived from their common relation to C. The fact that two elements are each connected not only by a straight line – the shortest – but also by a broken line, as it were, is an enrichment from a formal-sociological standpoint. Points that cannot be contacted by the straight line are connected by the third element, which offers a different side to each of the other two, and yet fuses these different sides in the unity of its own personality. Discords between two parties which they themselves cannot remedy, are accommodated by the third or by absorption in a comprehensive whole.

Yet the indirect relation does not only strengthen the direct one. It may also disturb it. No matter how close a triad may be, there is always the occasion on which two of the three members regard the third as an intruder. The reason may be the mere fact that he shares in certain moods which can unfold in all their intensity and tenderness only when two can meet without distraction: the sensitive union of two is always irritated by the spectator. It may also be noted how extraordinarily difficult and rare it is for three people to attain a really uniform mood – when visiting a museum, for instance, or looking at a landscape – and how much more easily such a mood emerges between two. A and B may stress and harmoniously feel their *m*, because the *n* which A does not share with B, and the *x* which B does not share with A, are at once spontaneously conceded to be individual prerogatives located, as it were, on another plane. If, however, C joins the company, who shares *n* with A and *x* with B, the result is that (even under this scheme, which is the one most favorable to the unity of the whole) harmony of feeling is made completely impossible. Two may actually be *one* party, or may stand entirely beyond any question of party. But it is usual for just such finely tuned combinations of three at once to result in three parties of two persons each, and thus to destroy the unequivocal character of the relations between each two of them.

The sociological structure of the dyad is characterized by two phenomena that are absent from it. One is the intensification of relation by a third element, or by a social framework that transcends both members of the dyad. The other is any disturbance and distraction of pure and immediate reciprocity. In some cases it is precisely this absence which makes the dyadic relationship more intensive and strong. For, many otherwise undeveloped, unifying forces that derive from more remote psychical reservoirs come to life in the feeling of exclusive dependence upon one another and of hopelessness that cohesion might come from anywhere but immediate interaction. Likewise, they carefully avoid many disturbances and dangers into which confidence in a third party and in the triad itself might lead the two. This intimacy, which is the tendency of relations between two persons, is the reason why the dyad constitutes the chief seat of jealousy.

Dyads, Triads, and Larger Groups

Dyads thus have very specific features. This is shown not only by the fact that the addition of a third person completely changes them, but also, and even more so, by the common observation that the further expansion to four or more by no means correspondingly modifies the group any further. For instance, a marriage with one child has a character which is completely different from that of a childless marriage, but it is not significantly different from a marriage with two or more children. To be sure, the difference resulting from the advent of the second child is again much more considerable than is that which results from the third. But this really follows from the norm mentioned: in many respects, the marriage with one child is a relation consisting of two elements – on the one hand, the parental unit, and on the other, the child. The second child is not only a fourth member of a relation but, sociologically speaking, also a third, with the peculiar effects of the third member. For, as soon as infancy has passed, it is much more often the parents who form a functional unit within the family than it is the totality of the children.

In an analogous way, in regard to marriage forms, the decisive difference is between monogamy and bigamy, whereas the third or twentieth wife is relatively unimportant for the marriage structure. The transition to a second wife is more consequential, at least in one sense, than is that to an even larger number. For it is precisely the duality of wives that can give rise to the sharpest conflicts and deepest disturbances in the husband's life, while they do not arise in the case of a greater plurality. The reason is that a larger number than two entails a de-classing and de-individualizing of the wives, a decisive reduction of the relationship to its sensuous basis (since a more intellectual relationship also is always more individualized). In general, therefore, the husband's deeper disturbances that characteristically and exclusively flow from a double relationship cannot come up.

The Triad*1. The Sociological Significance of the Third Element*

What has been said indicates to a great extent the role of the third element, as well as the configurations that operate among three social elements. The dyad represents both the first social synthesis and unification, and the first separation and antithesis. The appearance of the third party indicates transition, conciliation, and abandonment of absolute contrast (although, on occasion, it introduces contrast). The triad as such seems to me to result in three kinds of typical group formations. All of them are impossible if there are only two elements; and, on the other hand, if there are more than three, they are either equally impossible or only expand in quantity but do not change their formal type.

2. The Non-Partisan and the Mediator

It is sociologically very significant that isolated elements are unified by their common relation to a phenomenon which lies outside of them. This applies as much to the alliance between states for the purpose of defense against a common enemy as to the "invisible church" which unifies all faithful in their equal relation to the one God. The group-forming, mediating function of a third element will be discussed in a later context. In the cases under examination now, the third element is at such a distance from the other two

that there exist no properly sociological interactions which concern all three elements alike. Rather, there are configurations of two. In the center of sociological attention, there is either the relation between the two joining elements, the relation between them as a unit and the center of interest that confronts them. At the moment, however, we are concerned with three elements which are so closely related or so closely approach one another that they form a group, permanent or momentary.

In the most significant of all dyads, monogamous marriage, the child or children, as the third element, often has the function of holding the whole together. Among many "nature peoples," only childbirth makes marriage perfect or insoluble. And certainly one of the reasons why developing culture makes marriages deeper and closer is that children become independent relatively late and therefore need longer care. Perfection of marriage through childbirth rests, of course, on the value which the child has for the husband, and on his inclination, sanctioned by law and custom, to expel a childless wife. But the actual result of the third element, the child, is that it alone really closes the circle by tying the parents to one another. This can occur in two forms. The existence of the third element may directly start or strengthen the union of the two, as for instance, when the birth of a child increases the spouses' mutual love, or at least the husband's for his wife. Or the relation of each of the spouses to the child may produce a new and indirect bond between them. In general, the common preoccupations of a married couple with the child reveal that their union passes through the child, as it were; the union often consists of sympathies which could not exist without such a point of mediation. This emergence of the inner socialization of three elements, which the two elements by themselves do not desire, is the reason for a phenomenon mentioned earlier, namely, the tendency of unhappily married couples not to wish children. They instinctively feel that the child would close a circle within which they would be nearer one another, not only externally but also in their deeper psychological layers, than they are inclined to be.

When the third element functions as a non-partisan, we have a different variety of mediation. The non-partisan either produces the concord of two colliding parties, whereby he withdraws after making the effort of creating direct contact between the unconnected or quarreling elements; or he functions as an arbiter who balances, as it were, their contradictory claims against one another and eliminates what is incompatible in them . . . The non-partisan shows each party the claims and arguments of the other; they thus lose the tone of subjective passion which usually provokes the same tone on the part of the adversary. . . .

A third mediating social element deprives conflicting claims of their affective qualities because it neutrally formulates and presents these claims to the two parties involved. Thus this circle that is fatal to all reconciliation is avoided: the vehemence of the one no longer provokes that of the other, which in turn intensifies that of the first, and so forth, until the whole relationship breaks down. Furthermore, because of the non-partisan, each party to the conflict not only listens to more objective matters but is also forced to put the issue in more objective terms than it would if it confronted the other without mediation.

It is important for the analysis of social life to realize clearly that the constellation thus characterized constantly emerges in all groups of more than two elements. To be sure, the mediator may not be specifically chosen, nor be known or designated as such. But the triad here serves merely as a type or scheme; ultimately all cases of mediation can be reduced to this form. From the conversation among three persons that lasts only an hour, to the permanent family of three, there is no triad in which a dissent between any two

elements does not occur from time to time – a dissent of a more harmless or more pointed, more momentary or more lasting, more theoretical or more practical nature – and in which the third member does not play a mediating role . . . Such mediations do not even have to be performed by means of words. A gesture, a way of listening, the mood that radiates from a particular person, are enough to change the difference between two individuals so that they can seek understanding, are enough to make them feel their essential commonness which is concealed under their acutely differing opinions, and to bring this divergence into the shape in which it can be ironed out the most easily. The situation does not have to involve a real conflict or fight. It is rather the thousand insignificant differences of opinion, the allusions to an antagonism of personalities, the emergence of quite momentary contrasts of interest or feeling, which continuously color the fluctuating forms of all living together; and this social life is constantly determined in its course by the presence of the third person, who almost inevitably exercises the function of mediation. This function makes the round among the three elements, since the ebb and flow of social life realizes the form of conflict in every possible combination of two members.

3. *The Tertius Gaudens*

. . . [T]he non-partisan may also use his relatively superior position for purely egoistic interests. While in the cases discussed, he behaved as a means to the ends of the group, he may also, inversely, make the interaction that takes place between the parties and between himself and them, a means for his own purposes. In the social life of well consolidated groups, this may happen merely as one event among others. But often the relation between the parties and the non-partisan emerges as a new relationship: elements that have never before formed an interactional unit may come into conflict; a third non-partisan element, which before was equally unconnected with either, may spontaneously seize upon the chances that this quarrel gives him; and thus an entirely unstable interaction may result which can have an animation and wealth of forms, for each of the elements engaged in it, which are out of all proportion to its brief life.

The advantage of the tertius may result from the fact that the remaining two hold each other in check, and he can make a gain which one of the two would otherwise deny him. The discord here only effectuates a paralyzation of forces which, if they only could, would strike against him. The situation thus really suspends interaction among the three elements, instead of fomenting it, although it is certainly, nonetheless, of the most distinct consequences for all of them. The case in which this situation is brought about on purpose will be discussed in connection with the next type of configuration among three elements. [Alternatively, the tertius may gain] an advantage only because action by one of the two conflicting parties brings it about for its own purposes – the tertius does not need to take the initiative. A case in point are the benefits and promotions which a party bestows upon him, only in order to offend its adversary. Thus, the English laws for the protection of labor originally derived, in part at least, from the mere rancor of the Tories against liberal manufacturers. Various charitable actions that result from competition for popularity also belong here. . . .

The formations that are more essential here emerge whenever the tertius makes his own indirect or direct gain by turning toward one of the two conflicting parties – but not intellectually and objectively, like the arbitrator, but practically, supporting or granting.

This general type has two main variants: either two parties are hostile toward one another and therefore compete for the favor of a third element; or they compete for the favor of the third element and therefore are hostile toward one another. This difference is important particularly for the further development of the threefold constellation. For where an already existing hostility urges each party to seek the favor of a third, the outcome of this competition – the fact that the third party joins one of the two, rather than the other – marks the real beginning of the fight. Inversely, two elements may curry favor with a third independently of one another. If so, this very fact may be the reason for their hostility, for their becoming parties. The eventual granting of the favor is thus the object, not the means of the conflict and, therefore, usually ends the quarrel. The decision is made, and further hostilities become practically pointless.

In both cases, the advantage of impartiality, which was the *tertius*' original attitude toward the two, consists in his possibility of making his decision depend on certain conditions. Where he is denied this possibility, for whatever reason, he cannot fully exploit the situation. This applies to one of the most common cases of the second type, namely, the competition between two persons of the same sex for the favor of one of the opposite sex. Here the decision of the third element does not depend on his or her will in the same sense as does that of a buyer who is confronted with two competing offers, or that of a ruler who grants privileges to one of two competing supplicants. The decision, rather, comes from already existing feelings which cannot be determined by any will, and which therefore do not even permit the will to be brought into a situation of choice. In these cases, therefore, we only exceptionally find offers intended to be decided by choice; and, although we genuinely have a situation of *tertius gaudens*, its thorough exploitation is, in general, not possible.

On the largest scale, the *tertius gaudens* is represented by the buying public in an economy with free competition. The fight among the producers for the buyer makes the buyer almost completely independent of the individual supplier. He is, however, completely dependent on their totality; and their coalition would, in fact, at once invert the relationship. But as it is, the buyer can base his purchase almost wholly on his appraisal of quality and price of the merchandise. His position even has the added advantage that the producers must try to anticipate the conditions described: they must guess the consumer's un verbalized or unconscious wishes, and they must suggest wishes that do not exist at all, and train him for them. These situations of *tertius gaudens* may be arranged along a continuum. At the one end, perhaps, there is the above-mentioned case of the woman between two suitors. Here the decision depends on the two men's natures, rather than on any of their activities. The chooser, therefore, usually makes no conditions and thus does not fully exploit the situation. At the other end, there is the situation which gives the *tertius gaudens* his extreme advantage. It is found in modern market economy with its complete exclusion of the personal element: here the advantage of the chooser reaches a point where the parties even relieve him of the maximum intensification of his own bargaining condition.

Thus the advantage accruing to the *tertius* derives from the fact that he has an equal, equally independent, and for this very reason decisive, relation to two others. The advantage, however, does not exclusively depend on the hostility of the two. A certain general differentiation, mutual strangeness, or qualitative dualism may be sufficient. . . .

The favorable position of the *tertius* disappears quite generally the moment the two others become a unit – the moment, that is, the group in question changes from a combination of three elements back into that of two. It is instructive, not only in

regard to this particular problem but in regard to group life in general, to observe that this result may be brought about without any personal conciliation or fusion of interests. The object of the antagonism can be withdrawn from the conflict of subjective claims by being fixed objectively. . . .

4. *Divide et Impera*

The previously discussed combinations of three elements were characterized by an existing or emerging conflict between two, from which the third drew his advantage. One particular variety of this combination must now be considered separately, although in reality it is not always clearly delimited against other types. The distinguishing nuance consists in the fact that the third element intentionally produces the conflict in order to gain a dominating position Its outline is that initially two elements are united or mutually dependent in regard to a third, and that this third element knows how to put the forces combined against him into action against one another. The outcome is that the two either keep each other balanced so that he, who is not interfered with by either, can pursue his advantages; or that they so weaken one another that neither of them can stand up against his superiority.

The separation of the elements attains a more active, rather than a merely prohibitive form when the third person creates jealousy between them. The reference here is not yet to cases where he makes them destroy one another. On the contrary, here we are thinking of tendencies which often are conservative: the third wants to maintain his already existing prerogative by preventing a threatening coalition of the other two from arising, or at least from developing beyond mere beginnings. This technique seems to have been used with particular finesse in a case that is reported of ancient Peru. It was the general custom of the Incas to divide a newly conquered tribe in two approximately equal halves and to place a supervisor over each of them, but to give these two supervisors slightly different ranks. This was indeed the most suitable means for provoking rivalry between the two heads, which prevented any united action against the ruler on the part of the subjected territory. By contrast, both identical ranks and greatly different ranks would have made unification much easier. If the two heads had had the same rank, an equal distribution of leadership in case of action would have been more likely than any other arrangement; and, since there would have been need for subordination, peers would have most probably submitted to such a technical necessity. If the two heads had had very different ranks, the leadership of the one would have found no opposition. The slight difference in rank least of all allows an organic and satisfactory arrangement in the unification feared, since the one would doubtless have claimed unconditional prerogative because of his superiority, which, on the other hand, was not significant enough to suggest the same claim to the other.

The principle of the unequal distribution of values (of whatever description) in order to make the ensuing jealousy a means for "divide and rule," is a widely popular technique. But it should be noted that there are certain sociological circumstances that offer basic protection against it. Thus, the attempt was made to agitate Australian aborigines against one another by means of unequally distributed gifts. But this always failed in the face of the communism of the hordes, which distributed all gifts among all members, no matter to which they had gone. In addition to jealousy, it is particularly distrust which is used as a psychological means to the same end. Distrust, in contrast to jealousy, is apt to prevent especially larger groups from forming conspiratory

associations. In the most effective manner, this principle was employed by the government of Venice which, on a gigantic scale, invited the citizens to denounce all in any way suspect fellow citizens. Nobody knew whether his nearest acquaintance was in the service of the state inquisition. Revolutionary plans, which presuppose the mutual confidence of large numbers of persons, were thus cut at the root, so that in the later history of Venice, open revolts were practically absent.

The grossest form of “divide and rule,” the unleashing of positive battle between two parties, may have its intention in the relationship of the third element either to the two or to objects lying outside them. The second of these two alternatives occurs where one of three job applicants manages to turn the two others against one another so that they reciprocally destroy their chances by gossip and calumny which each circulates about the other. In all these cases, the art of the third element is shown by the distance he knows how to keep between himself and the action which he starts. The more invisible the threads are by which he directs the fight, the better he knows how to build a fire in such a way that it goes on burning without his further interference and even surveillance – not only the more pointed and undistracted is the fight between the two until their mutual ruin is reached, but the more likely is it that the prize of the fight between them, as well as other objects that are valuable to him, seem almost automatically to fall into his lap. In this technique, too, the Venetians were masters. In order to take possession of estates owned by noblemen on the mainland, they used the means of awarding high titles to younger or inferior members of the nobility. The indignation of their elders and superiors always presented occasions for brawls and breaches of the peace between the two parties, whereupon the government of Venice, in all legal formality, confiscated the estates of the guilty parties.

It is very plausible that in all such cases, the union of the discordant elements against the common suppressor would be a most expedient step to take. The failure of this union quite distinctly shows the general condition of “divide and rule”: the fact that hostilities by no means have their sufficient ground in the clash of real interests. Once there is a need for hostility at all, once there is an antagonism which is merely groping for its object, it is easy to substitute for the adversary against whom hostility would make sense and have a purpose, a totally different one. “Divide and rule” requires of its artist that he create a general state of excitation and desire to fight by means of instigations, calumnies, flatteries, the excitement of expectations, etc. Once this is done, it is possible to succeed in slipping in an adversary that is not properly indicated. The form of the fight itself can thus be completely separated from its content and the reasonableness of this content. The third element, against whom the hostility of the two ought to be directed, can make himself invisible between them, so to speak, so that the clash of the two is not against him but against one another.

Where the purpose of the third party is directed, not toward an object, but toward the immediate domination of the other two elements, two sociological considerations are essential. (1) Certain elements are formed in such a way that they can be fought successfully only by similar elements. The wish to subdue them finds no immediate point of attack. It is, therefore, necessary to divide them within themselves, as it were, and to continue a fight among the parts which they can wage with homogeneous weapons until they are sufficiently weakened to fall to the third element. It has been said of England that she could gain India only by means of India. Already Xerxes had recognized that Greeks were best to fight Greece. It is precisely those whose similarity of interests makes them depend upon one another who best know their mutual weaknesses

and vulnerable points. The principle of *similia similibus*, of eliminating a condition by producing a similar one, therefore applies here on the largest scale. Mutual promotion and unification is best gained if there is a certain measure of qualitative difference, because this difference produces a supplementation, a growing together, and an organically differentiated life. Mutual destruction, on the other hand, seems to succeed best if there is qualitative homogeneity, except, of course, in those cases where one party has such a quantitative superiority of power that the relation of its particular characteristics to those of the other becomes altogether irrelevant. The whole category of hostilities that has its extreme development in the fight between brothers, draws its radically destructive character from the fact that experience and knowledge, as well as the instincts flowing from their common root, give each of them the most deadly weapons precisely against this specific adversary. The basis of the relations among like elements is their common knowledge of external conditions and their empathy with the inner situation. Evidently, this is also the means for the deepest hurts, which neglect no possibility of attack. Since in its very nature this means is reciprocal, it leads to the most radical annihilation. For this reason, the fight of like against like, the splitting up of the adversary into two qualitatively homogeneous parties, is one of the most pervasive realizations of "divide and rule."

(2) Where it is not possible for the suppressor to have his victims alone do his business, where, that is, he himself must take a hand in the fight, the schema is very simple: he supports one of them long enough for the other to be suppressed, whereupon the first is an easy prey for him. The most expedient manner is to support the one who is the stronger to begin with. This may take on the more negative form that, within a complex of elements intended for suppression, the more powerful is merely spared. When subjugating Greece, Rome was remarkably considerate in her treatment of Athens and Sparta. This procedure is bound to produce resentment and jealousy in the one camp, and haughtiness and blind confidence in the other – a split which makes the prey easily available for the suppressor. It is a technique employed by many rulers: he protects the stronger of two, both of whom are actually interested in his own downfall, until he has ruined the weaker; then he changes fronts and advances against the one now left in isolation, and subjugates him. This technique is no less popular in the founding of world empires than in the brawls of street urchins. It is employed by governments in the manipulation of political parties as it is in competitive struggles in which three elements confront one another – perhaps a very powerful financier or industrialist and two less important competitors whose powers, though different from one another, are yet both a nuisance to him. In this case, the first, in order to prevent the two others from joining up, will make a price agreement or production arrangement with the stronger of the two, who draws considerable advantages from it, while the weaker is destroyed by the arrangement. Once he is, the second can be shaken off, for until then he was the ally of the first, but now he has no more backing and is being ruined by means of underselling or other methods.

The Web of Group-Affiliations

Analogies between Perception and Group-Formation

... The development which takes place among ideas finds an analogue in the relationship of individuals to each other. At first the individual sees himself in an environment which is relatively indifferent to his individuality, but which has implicated him in a web of

circumstances. These circumstances impose on him a close coexistence with those whom the accident of birth has placed next to him. This close coexistence represents the first condition of the phylogenetic and ontogenetic development, whose continuation aims toward the association of homogeneous members from heterogeneous groups. Thus, the family comprises a number of different individuals, who are at first entirely dependent on this familial association. However, as the development of society progresses, each individual establishes for himself contacts with persons who stand outside this original group-affiliation, but who are "related" to him by virtue of an actual similarity of talents, inclinations, activities, and so on. The association of persons because of external coexistence is more and more superseded by association in accordance with internal relationships. Just as a higher concept binds together the elements which a great number of very different perceptual complexes have in common, so do practical considerations bind together like individuals, who are otherwise affiliated with quite alien and unrelated groups. New contacts are established between individuals which penetrate every nook and cranny of the contacts that are earlier, relatively more natural and that are held together by relationships of a more sensual kind. . . .

Multiple Group-Affiliations Which Are Not In Conflict

The number of different social groups in which the individual participates is one of the earmarks of culture. The modern person belongs first of all to his parental family, then to his family of procreation and thereby also to the family of his wife. Beyond this he belongs to his occupational group, which often involves him in several interest-groups. For example, in an occupation that embraces both supervisory and subordinate personnel, each person participates in the affairs of his particular business, department office, etc., each of which comprises higher and lower employees. Moreover, a person also participates in a group made up of similarly situated employees from several, different firms. Then, a person is likely to be aware of his citizenship, of the fact that he belongs to a particular social class. He is, moreover, a reserve-officer, he belongs to a few clubs and engages in a social life which puts him in touch with different social groups. This is a great variety of groups. Some of these groups are integrated. Others are, however, so arranged that one group appears as the original focus of an individual's affiliation, from which he then turns toward affiliation with other, quite different groups on the basis of his special qualities, which distinguish him from other members of his primary group. His bond with the primary group may well continue to exist, like one aspect of a complex image, which retains its original time-space coordinates though the image itself has long since become established psychologically as an objective configuration in its own right. . . .

These patterns [of group-affiliation] have the peculiarity of treating the individual as a member of a group rather than as an individual, and of incorporating him thereby in other groups as well. An association which is derived from the membership of other associations places the individual in a number of groups. But these groups do not overlap and the problems which they entail for the individual differ from the problems posed by the sociological constellations which will be discussed subsequently. Group-formation during the Middle Ages was inspired by the idea that only equals could be associated, however often the practice deviated from the theory. This idea obviously was connected with the completeness with which medieval man surrendered himself to his group-affiliation. Hence, cities allied themselves first of all with cities, monasteries with

monasteries, guilds with related guilds. This was an extension of the equalitarian principle, even though in fact members of one corporate body may not have been the equals of members from an allied group. But as *members of a corporate body* they were equals. The alliance was valid only in so far as this was the case, and the fact that the members were individually differentiated in other respects was irrelevant. This way of doing things was extended to alliances between *different* groups, but these groups were regarded even then as equal powers within the new alliance. The individual as such was not a fact in such an alliance; hence his indirect participation in it did not add an individuating element to his personality. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later, this was the transitional step from the medieval type to the modern type of group-formation. The medieval group in the strict sense was one which did not permit the individual to become a member in other groups, a rule which the old guilds and the early medieval corporations probably illustrate most clearly. The modern type of group-formation makes it possible for the isolated individual to become a member in whatever number of groups he chooses. Many consequences result from this.

Group-Affiliations and the Individual Personality

The groups with which the individual is affiliated constitute a system of coordinates, as it were, such that each new group with which he becomes affiliated circumscribes him more exactly and more unambiguously. To belong to any one of these groups leaves the individual considerable leeway. But the larger the number of groups to which an individual belongs, the more improbable is it that other persons will exhibit the same combination of group-affiliations, that these particular groups will "intersect" once again [in a second individual]. . . .

Similarly as individuals, we form the personality out of particular elements of life, each of which has arisen from, or is interwoven with, society. This personality is subjectivity par excellence in the sense that it combines the elements of culture in an individual manner. There is here a reciprocal relation between the subjective and the objective. As the person becomes affiliated with a social group, he surrenders himself to it. A synthesis of such subjective affiliations creates a group in an objective sense. But the person also regains his individuality, because his pattern of participation is unique; hence the fact of multiple group-participation creates in turn a new subjective element. Causal determination of, and purposive actions by, the individual appear as two sides of the same coin. The genesis of the personality has been interpreted as the point of intersection for innumerable social influences, as the end-product of heritages derived from the most diverse groups and periods of adjustment. Hence, individuality is interpreted as that particular set of constituent elements which in their quality and combination make up the individual. But as the individual becomes affiliated with social groups in accordance with the diversity of his drives and interests, he thereby expresses and returns what he has "received," though he does so consciously and on a higher level.

As the individual leaves his established position within *one* primary group, he comes to stand at a point at which many groups "intersect." The individual as a moral personality comes to be circumscribed in an entirely new way, but he also faces new problems. The security and lack of ambiguity in his former position gives way to uncertainty in the conditions of his life. This is the sense of an old English proverb which says: he who speaks two languages is a knave. It is true that external and internal

conflicts arise through the multiplicity of group-affiliations, which threaten the individual with psychological tensions or even a schizophrenic break. But it is also true that multiple group-affiliations can strengthen the individual and reenforce the integration of his personality. Conflicting and integrating tendencies are mutually reinforcing. Conflicting tendencies can arise just because the individual has a core of inner unity. The ego can become more clearly conscious of this unity, the more he is confronted with the task of reconciling within himself a diversity of group-interests. The effect of marriage on both spouses is that they belong to several families; this has always been a source of enrichment, a way of expanding one's interests and relationships but also of intensifying one's conflicts. These conflicts may induce the individual to make internal and external adjustments, but also to assert himself energetically. . . .

Cross-Pressures Arising from Multiple Group-Affiliations: Examples from the Middle Ages

The sociological determination of the individual will be greater when the groups which influence him are juxtaposed than if they are concentric. That is to say, human aggregates such as the nation, a common social position, an occupation, and specific niches within the latter, do not allot any special position to the person who participates in them, because participation in the smallest of these groups already implies participation in the larger groups. But groups which are interrelated in this way do not always control individuals in a unified way. The fact that these associations are related to each other in a concentric way may mean not that they are related organically but that they are in mechanical juxtaposition. Hence, these associations will affect the individual, as if each of them was independent of the other

Such awkwardness and difficulties arise for the person as a result of his affiliation with groups which surround him concentrically. Yet, this is one of the first and most direct ways in which the individual, who has begun his social existence by being affiliated with one group only, comes to participate in a number of groups. The peculiar character of group-formation in the Middle Ages in contrast with the modern way has been stressed frequently. In the Middle Ages affiliation with a group absorbed the whole man. It served not only a momentary purpose, which was defined objectively. It was rather an association of all who had combined for the sake of that purpose while the association absorbed the whole life of each of them. If the urge to form associations persisted, then it was accompanied by having whole associations combined in confederations of a higher order. This form, which enables the single individual to participate in a number of groups without alienating him from his affiliation with his original locality, may appear simple today, but it was in fact a great social invention. This form could be serviceable as long as men had not invented purposive associations, which made it possible for persons to work together by impersonal means for impersonal ends, and thereby to leave the personality of the individual inviolate. The enrichment of the individual as a social being which was attainable under the Medieval type of group-formation, was to be sure, a limited one, while the enrichment made possible by purposive associations is not limited in this sense.

. . . The concentric pattern of group-affiliations is a systematic and often also an historical stage, which is prior to that situation in which the groups with which persons affiliate are juxtaposed and "intersect" in one and the same person . . .

Individualism and Multiple Group-Affiliation

The modern pattern differs sharply from the concentric pattern of group-affiliations as far as a person's achievements are concerned. Today someone may belong, aside from his occupational position, to a scientific association, he may sit on a board of directors of a corporation and occupy an honorific position in the city government. Such a person will be more clearly determined sociologically, the less his participation in one group by itself enjoins upon him participation in another. He is determined sociologically in the sense that the groups "intersect" in his person by virtue of his affiliation with them. Whether or not the fact that a person who performs several functions reveals a characteristic combination of his talents, a special breadth of activity depends not only on his participation in several offices and institutions but naturally on the extent of their division of labor. In this way, the objective structure of a society provides a framework within which an individual's non-interchangeable and singular characteristics may develop and find expression, depending on the greater or lesser possibilities which that structure allows. . . .

Individualism and Collectivism in Modern Society

The development of the public mind shows itself by the fact that a sufficient number of groups is present which have form and organization. Their number is sufficient in the sense that they give an individual of many gifts the opportunity to pursue each of his interests in association with others. Such multiplicity of groups implies that the ideals of collectivism and of individualism are approximated to the same extent. On the one hand the individual finds a community for each of his inclinations and strivings which makes it easier to satisfy them. This community provides an organizational form for his activities, and it offers in this way all the advantages of group-membership as well as of organizational experience. On the other hand, the specific qualities of the individual are preserved through the combination of groups which can be a different combination in each case.

Thus one can say that society arises from the individual and that the individual arises out of association. An advanced culture broadens more and more the social groups to which we belong with our whole personality; but at the same time the individual is made to rely on his own resources to a greater extent and he is deprived of many supports and advantages associated with the tightly-knit, primary group. Thus, the creation of groups and associations in which any number of people can come together on the basis of their interest in a common purpose, compensates for that isolation of the personality which develops out of breaking away from the narrow confines of earlier circumstances. . . .