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What People Need from One Another

People need other people for every aspect of their lives. They are conceived through other people and they are *dependent* on others for their survival. Everything that they need but cannot make themselves must come from others. What they need to know and do not know yet must be learnt from others. People cannot do without each other. That is why they live together in large or small *social arrangements*: small family units or extended families, villages, neighbourhoods, societies and businesses, churches, unions and political parties, groups of friends and classes at school. The most comprehensive social arrangement is referred to simply as *society*.

1 People as interdependent beings

No one lives completely separately from other human beings. Even the hunter who roams the forest carries tools that someone else has made. At the end of the hunt he returns to the inhabited world and sells the hides of the animals he has shot or trapped to buyers, so as to be able to purchase all sorts of things that are unobtainable in the forest.

For it is impossible to make everything you need yourself, and everyone is therefore reliant on the products of others. Even something as simple as a hunting knife takes dozens of people to make it: someone to mine the ore, someone to melt

down the iron ore into iron, someone to harden the steel and someone to forge the blade. And each of these people in turn needs tools and raw materials that others have made.

All these activities must be geared to one another, so that one person can go on working with the products that someone else has supplied. So a knife, or any product at all, embodies the concerted efforts of an entire *network* of people.

Similarly, no one can work out every problem unaided, or see beforehand all the knowledge and skills that will be needed in order to survive in the world. So every individual relies on fellow human beings to pass on this necessary knowledge and these essential skills. Children do not learn to speak automatically – they pick it up from their parents, and their brothers and sisters. Nor do toddlers automatically know what is good for them. They put all sorts of things in their mouths, and it takes them a long time to register what they are told – that some things are 'edible' and others 'dirty' or 'poisonous', that food may be 'clean' or 'unclean'.

Small children are dependent on others to take care of them, and a baby which is left to fend for itself will not survive for very long. In the event of illness or accident, and in old age, we are dependent on others to take care of us. When people are described as 'independent', it does not mean that they do not need anyone else; it means that they can pay for everything that is done for them, either with money or by doing something else in return. No one is independent. People cannot take care of themselves; at most they can ensure that others will take care of them.

These mutual dependencies mean that people are linked to one another. *Social arrangements consist of people who are connected by mutual dependencies.* In other words, social arrangements consist of *interdependent* people.

Social science studies people in the social arrangements they form with one another. That is what this book is about: about the origins and the workings of social arrangements, and about the changing patterns of dependence between people.

2 Conditions for human survival

What do people need in order to survive, and what do they need their fellow human beings for? To put it differently, what *conditions* are necessary for human existence? Certain conditions apply to almost all living creatures: they must have access to sufficient (but not too much) oxygen, the air temperature must not be too high or too low, and so forth. Physical conditions like these will not concern us here. We are concerned with conditions that make people dependent upon their fellow human beings, i.e. *social conditions for existence*:

1 All people need *food* every day;
2 They need *shelter*;
3 They need *protection* from enemies and predatory animals;
4 They need the *affection* of others;
5 They cannot do without *knowledge* about the surrounding world;
6 They must be able to *control* themselves.

The list could be extended and elaborated. But it sums up the main conditions that must be fulfilled for people to survive. How they are fulfilled, however, will differ enormously from one society to the next.

As long as the conditions for their existence are met, people scarcely stop to think about them. It is only when something is lacking, or when some threat is perceived, that they become aware of them: then they experience a *need* for food, for protection, or for affection. Although the conditions for existence are roughly the same for all people, the way in which people experience their needs may be very different.

People are dependent on others because they can only fulfil the necessary conditions for their continued existence together with other people. The ways in which they do so reflect the kinds of social arrangements they form with one another.

Food

Nowadays, even those people who do possess a garden are more likely to plant flowers in it than they are to grow potatoes or grain. Some families do keep a little plot of land to grow some of their own food. In general, however, people buy their food washed and weighed, processed and packaged in the shops, and sometimes they even have it served up to them in a restaurant. Even farmers, who certainly produce food on a large scale, eat very little of their produce themselves. They sell most of the harvest, and use the money – just like anyone else – to do their shopping at the butcher's, the baker's and the greengrocer's. While modern farmers tend to produce a great deal, they produce a great deal of the same thing; for a varied diet they purchase their food elsewhere.

In a modern society, then, people are completely dependent on others for their food: dependent on shopkeepers, who in turn rely on auctioneers and wholesalers, who obtain their wares from growers, manufacturers and importers. Thus, everyone is dependent on others for their food supply, but not on any one particular individual, for buyers can always decide to take their trade elsewhere. Nowadays, there are fewer and fewer farmers producing the food for the rest of the population, who do not themselves produce food but are occupied with other things. Less than a hundred years ago, almost one-third of the working population of Europe was engaged in agriculture or fishing; now the figure is under 5 per cent. And it was only a few decades ago that many factory workers had vegetable gardens at home, and kept chickens, rabbits or a goat. So their families were partly self-sufficient for their food, rather than being totally dependent on shopkeepers.

In traditional agriculture, a farmer's family lived almost entirely off the land, and had little left to exchange or sell. This is still the normal pattern of life for the rural population in large parts of the world: farming families that eat everything they grow and grow everything they eat. These house-

holds, as they meet their food requirements themselves, are not – for their food – dependent on others. But it follows that the individual members of such a family are all the more dependent on each other: to work the land, to fetch in the harvest, to care for the animals and to prepare the food. The small children are dependent on their parents, and the grandparents on their children. (This is why people in such countries often want to have large families, to ensure that they will be cared for in their old age.) Such farming families are therefore extremely dependent on just a few people – their relatives.

Since the variety of food available has also increased, people can make choices and develop their own taste and style. This gives rise to wider variations between people within a society, and individuals can adopt distinctive styles of eating.

The pattern of dependence within a society apparently changes to reflect the way in which the food supply is arranged. The *network of dependencies* surrounding the food supply stretches much further in present-day society, and connects far more people than before, at every intersection.

Shelter

People must be able to protect themselves from heat and cold, from wind and rain, and from vermin. This they do in two ways: with clothing (which they carry about with them on their bodies) and with a dwelling (which generally remains in one place). In some regions people cannot go a single day without clothes or a roof over their heads, while in others people scarcely need such protection at all. This obviously has to do with the climate and season.

Spinning, weaving and sewing were all traditionally women's work, which meant that men and children were dependent on women for their clothing. The material was made from sheep's wool, cotton or flax. So farming families could take care of these needs themselves. But when it came

to dwellings, stables and sheds, things were generally tackled differently in traditional agricultural societies. To put up these buildings and structures required the help of neighbours. The assistance would be repaid when the neighbours in turn needed a new house to be built. This repayment in kind, or *mutual assistance*, linked together households that were fairly independent for their food supply in a larger network of dependencies. People who had exerted themselves for their neighbours had to hope and trust that these neighbours would fulfil their obligations when it was their turn to do so.

Nowadays, very few people build their own houses. Other people are always needed for this task, but neighbours no longer enter into the picture. Houses are designed by architects and built under the supervision of building contractors by bricklayers, carpenters, electricians and plumbers – in short, by skilled workers who have made this skill into their paid occupation. The houses they build are offered to others for sale or for rent. The builders do not work because they must return a service to someone; usually, they do not even know who will be living in the new house. They work because they receive wages in the form of money, which they can use to buy food and clothing and to rent or buy a house of their own. This is how a *money economy* works. Because people all apply themselves to a particular type of work or product, which they supply indirectly to others for money, people do not have to use everything they make; by the same token, they can use things without having to make them. The money they receive for their own products can be used to purchase the products of others. So the work to be done is divided up among countless specialists: this is the *division of labour* in society. The division of labour and the money economy make it possible to use things without producing them oneself, and they also make it necessary for everyone to produce something – not for the purpose of using it, but in order to gain money to buy other people's products. This extends the network of dependencies still further: as far as the money goes.

Protection

People may find their existence threatened from various sources, not only by a shortage of food, by cold weather or storms, but also by germs, predators and other people. For most modern people, lions and tigers are attractions to be viewed at the zoo or on safari, but once they constituted a direct threat. Only a hundred years ago, wolves and bears regularly claimed victims in sparsely populated areas of Europe and America, and tigers are feared even today in the peasant villages of South Asia. In prehistoric times, the hunting of large wild animals was in effect a war waged by people against other animal species. To track down those animals and kill them, the hunters had to be able to rely on one another and to harmonize their actions with great precision: *coordination* was essential. And after the hunt, they had to agree about how to divide up the spoils. But many tens of thousands of years ago, humans triumphed over other species in the fight for existence, driving the large predators into inaccessible corners of the world. Most of these species are now even threatened with extinction by humans.

Since that battle was won, the greatest threat to people has come from two sides: from germs, which can cause disease, and from other people, who may try to take someone else's life or property. For protection against germs, people are nowadays dependent on medical practitioners. And for protection from robbers or enemy soldiers they also rely on their fellow human beings: to ward off armed robbers and assailants they need armed guards or police, and to repel enemy forces they need forces of their own.

When people first settled in one place to work the land, they became especially vulnerable to attack by other people looking for a chance to plunder the crops in their fields, their cattle or their stores. In general, the more productive a society is, the more vulnerable it becomes. Many peoples abandoned agriculture – or even decided not to try it – because they knew the yield would arouse the envy of

pillaging neighbours. One band of warriors would drive out another to claim the spoils for itself. In the course of time, this band ceased to plunder at random; instead it would impose a fixed duty on the peasants in the area – a tribute – and keep other marauders away. In this way, the peasants and the warriors became dependent on one another for tribute and protection.

So relationships of dependence do not only arise when people cooperate in some way; they will often develop between two groups both living in conflict with a third group. These dependence networks based on tribute and protection grew into military-agricultural societies covering vast areas and containing many hundreds of thousands of people.

Affection

People are also unable to do without the affection and regard of their fellow human beings. Very small children who are given enough to eat and drink and are laid in their cots covered with warm blankets can nevertheless be stunted in their development or become ill if there is no one to cuddle them and play with them. Experiments are not conducted with human babies, but there have been studies of the inmates of children's homes who were fed and changed but not cuddled or spoken to. These children became 'institutionalized'. They failed to develop properly, proved little resistant to disease, became despondent and apathetic, and lost all interest in their surroundings. That children – and adults too – need love and friendship from others is something that everyone knows, but that it is a necessary condition for survival is sometimes forgotten.

People also need the regard of their fellow human beings. They see themselves 'through the eyes of others' – as they think they are seen. In this way they form a *self-image*, which is determined by what they think other people think of them. They do not worry about everyone's opinion, but single out people from their past and present surroundings

who are important to them. Thus people are also dependent on others for something as personal as their self-image or identity.

When people do something that they believe will attract the censure of others, they feel a sense of shame. They wish 'the earth would swallow them up' so that they did not have to 'face' their fellow human beings. People who feel that they have sunk very deep in the regard of others, and no longer command any respect, become extremely depressed and may even commit suicide. This also happens when a loved one is lost. Affection and regard can thus both be a matter of life and death.

People do their best to win the affection of others, in all sorts of ways. They try to become rich and famous, to rise to a high position or to distinguish themselves in sports, science or the arts. They do so partly for the pleasure it gives them, but also because they need the regard and affection of others.

The people with whom an individual maintains bonds of affection seldom form a very extensive network. There are generally only a few 'significant others' – loved or respected persons in the immediate surroundings, and people from the past who still play an important part in the person's memory and imagination. The approval or rejection of people who are somewhat further removed is also significant, but this tends to be expressed more vaguely as what 'they all' think: the opinion of 'the whole class', 'the entire neighbourhood', 'the people at work', or even 'the public'. These phrases reflect someone's good name, reputation or popularity, to honour and disgrace, to pride and shame. All such feelings are bound up in a network of dependencies – they are, supremely, social emotions.

Knowledge

People can only survive in society if they acquire the necessary knowledge. As small children they learn to talk, discovering how to make themselves intelligible and to understand

what others say to them. They learn this mother tongue long before they go to school – it seems to happen 'by itself'. Small children also learn all kinds of practical skills at home, from dressing themselves and eating at the table to playing marbles and riding a bicycle. All the knowledge a person acquires comes from other people, sometimes casually – by following someone's example – and sometimes deliberately, by listening to teachers and studying textbooks.

In most countries, the majority of children attend elementary school for several years. In a particular country they will all learn roughly the same things. This is why the citizens of a country have a great deal of knowledge in common. On the other hand, children attend different schools when they are older and focus on diverse areas of knowledge. In this way, enormous differences in knowledge arise between the people of a single country. In other words, there is a common fund of *basic knowledge*, after which education fans out into different courses of varying length.

This education largely determines people's later occupation or career and hence their income, where they will live, how they will spend their leisure time, what kind of tastes they will develop, and even the kinds of opinions they are likely to have.

Since almost everyone in our society learns to read and write, and at least finishes elementary school, people who lack this basic knowledge are at a grave disadvantage. In centuries past, it was of little consequence if a peasant or workman was unable to read, write or make calculations, as they scarcely needed such skills for their work. Nowadays, however, this has all changed: everyone is assumed to be able to read instructions, newspapers and letters. Someone who cannot do so is labelled 'illiterate'. Once most of the people in a society can read and write, these skills are taken so much for granted that it becomes a matter of urgent necessity for those left behind to catch up. In this way, *a possibility for many becomes a necessity for everyone*.

The social arrangements within which someone lives determine what is, and what is not, essential knowledge. Thus we

do not have to be able to distinguish the poisonous fruits in the woods from the nutritious ones, but for wood-dwellers such knowledge is indispensable to their survival. We, on the other hand, must be able to pick out the right coins and notes to pay for the fruit we have selected at the greengrocer's. All such skills, again, are learnt from other people.

People living in modern societies, then, need to know different things to cope with their world than do the inhabitants of the rain forest. But we do not know *more* about our world than they know about theirs. They may well be able to distinguish fifteen different snake species, while we are often at a loss to explain why the lights go on when we flick a switch, or why the aeroplane in which we are travelling stays in the air. Nor does this ignorance matter very much, for in our society there are always people who have specialized in a particular subject. The electrician or aviation engineer could explain it all to us. The essential knowledge is spread out among countless specialists, a social *division of knowledge* that makes it possible for us to do and use a million things without knowing much about them.

Small children are dependent for everything – including the first knowledge they acquire – on their immediate surroundings. In the past, children learnt what they needed to know in a small circle, and learnt it from experience, whether it was hunting, working the land or labouring in the workshop.

To learn to read and write, however, children have to go to school. Everything else they learn there builds on this initial knowledge of writing. As more young people attend more years of schooling, that schooling becomes increasingly essential for others who want to be admitted into the network in which the transfer of knowledge takes place.

Direction

Children not only have a great deal to learn, but they also have a great deal to unlearn. At an early age they have to learn to control their bowel movements until the right time

and the right place. They may not grab whatever they want, and they are expected to finish what is on their plate. They must not fall asleep at school; they must go to bed, and get up, at certain set times. Gradually, natural bodily functions such as defecating, eating and sleeping are converted into habits which are acceptable to the outside world. In due course, the child is able to repress its natural inclinations and to give in to them at the appropriate time, in the lavatory, at the table, or in bed. This all happens without very much thought – almost automatically. The initial, natural inclinations are converted into a – social – second nature.

We cannot simply take whatever we choose from a shop counter. Someone who is angry is not free to take a club and smash someone else on the head. The watchword in every case is self-control. People must learn to control themselves and to refrain from actions that other people – and they themselves – deem unacceptable. But that is not all. People also have to learn to drive themselves to perform actions that other people – and they themselves – consider necessary. When the alarm-clock goes off, they have to force themselves to get up. Pupils must overcome a disinclination to turn off the television and do their homework. This 'self-driving' force means impelling yourself to do something, and preferably to do it well. As in riding a bicycle or driving a car, it is not enough to learn how to apply the brakes; you must also know how to accelerate in good time, and how to manoeuvre skilfully. People need to know how to drive themselves. For this, too, they need others to urge them along and steer them in the right direction. Self-control is a form of self-coercion: it makes people refrain from certain actions and perform others; it helps them to choose the right moment and the right place, and to do things in the proper way. People learn to drive themselves through the coercion exerted on them by others, in the first place by their parents – this is *external coercion*. But the world around us also puts us under pressure to 'coerce' ourselves; this is what is meant by expressions such as 'they have to want it themselves' or

'it is their own responsibility'. People are under *external coercion to coerce themselves*. Ultimately, they learn to control their impulses most of the time, without others having to exert constant pressure on them. This is *self-coercion*.

Every society has these three forms of coercion, though to differing degrees. The balance between them may also vary according to the particular situation. In some homes, children are not allowed to go out in the evenings; they are not given a key, and the door is simply locked. In other homes the father or mother will remind them that they have a test the next day and should go to bed on time, and there are still other homes where children come home when they please. At work and in the street, too, we come across these three types of coercion, in varying combinations.

People evidently need to learn how to control themselves in order to survive in society; and for this they need other people – directly at first, and later mostly indirectly. And here too, the relationships of dependence are strongest in the small circle of the family. The network later expands to include the school and the workplace. And it expands still further: in the background, for everyone, there are always inspectors and police officers maintaining external coercion. But in everyday life, most people are capable of controlling their actions themselves.

3 Societies: conditions for existence

A social arrangement may continue to exist even when all the people who originally belonged to it have gone. Mercedes, Manchester United and the Kingdom of the Netherlands all exist today, although the people who belonged to them in their earliest days have all been succeeded by others. Whenever a place falls vacant, because someone leaves or dies, someone else steps in to fill the gap. The newcomer must adapt upon joining, since all the surrounding positions are still occupied by the same people as before, who generally

want things to carry on as in the past. But the new arrivals are never completely identical to their predecessors, and their adjustment is never total. If only for this reason, social arrangements are bound to change in the course of time.

Sometimes a sudden change may occur, for instance when an entire group of members depart and new people take their place. The editorial boards of magazines fill up vacancies by *co-opting*: they choose their new members themselves. But sometimes the editorial board is taken over at a stroke by a new generation. Can we still speak, then, of the same magazine?

It may also happen that a social arrangement ceases to exist because some members leave, and no one comes to take their place. Many villages in France have gradually died out with the older generation of inhabitants, because the young have left, and no new families have settled there.

Small social arrangements function within more comprehensive ones, and these in turn operate within society as a whole. This embedding in more wide-ranging arrangements heightens the continuity of a social arrangement.

The survival of a society depends on a number of conditions. Although the conditions for existence of the individuals who together make up a society are intimately bound up with those of the society as a whole, they are not exactly the same. The society does not eat or wear a coat, but to fulfil the human needs of food and shelter, it is essential that the goods required should be produced and distributed in that society. So the first condition that must be fulfilled, for a society to survive, is the *production and distribution* of the goods its people need.

The second essential condition is that consecutive generations be absorbed into roughly the same networks, so that the society regenerates itself – *reproduction*. This means not only that children are conceived and born, but that they are brought up, educated and instructed, and prepared to take their place in the adult world.

Just as individual people need protection, the society as a

whole requires protection against hostile forces from outside, in other words against other societies: *external security*. But for a society to survive, there must also be protection for the individuals of that society against one another: *internal security*.

Just as essential is a certain bond of affection between the members of a society, a sense of 'us' or a certain mutual confidence and *solidarity*.

Finally, a society can only continue if its members have ways of thinking that enable them to find their way about their social and physical surroundings, and which they can pass on to one another: *orientation*.

The necessary conditions for the continued existence of societies are thus directly related to the conditions for survival of individual people, but the two sets of conditions are not exactly the same. For a society is not simply 'a huge number of people', nor is it a sort of 'giant human being'. A society is a *configuration* of people in certain *patterns of interdependence*. This society continues to exist even when some of its members die or leave. But a society cannot continue to exist if the patterns of interdependence disintegrate, or if new people are not constantly absorbed into it. That is the difference.

4 Conclusion

We have taken a bird's-eye view of the terrain. People, it is clear, are dependent upon one another. To survive, six basic conditions must be fulfilled, for all of which people are reliant on others: food, shelter, protection, affection, knowledge and self-control. Each of these conditions links up with certain types of dependence, whether in a small circle or a much larger one. Networks of dependence change when people grow up; furthermore, those in ancient societies were different from those of today, and those in geographically separate countries also differ widely.

The continued existence of a society is related to the

survival of the people who live in it, but is not identical to it: a society continues to exist when its members have gone, as long as new people, arrayed in roughly the same patterns of interdependence, come to take their place.