

# Beyond the opposition of individual and society, Part I: Acknowledging the constitutive social function of being an individual and 'de-totalizing' the idea of 'society'

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*This is the first part of our final assessment of the problem of 'individual and society.'<sup>1</sup> Against a brief sketch of the role of individualistic and universalistic theories and practices in the West the relation between the 'social' and the 'individual' is reconsidered, followed by a brief characterisation of the fundamental difference between animal and human functioning. By exploring the notion of elementary basic concepts further – introduced in the previous two articles – the complex (modal totality) concepts of sociology as a discipline are now considered – with particular reference to a classification of different ways of social interaction (classified in coordinational, communal and collective social relationships) as well as the complex nature of a principle. The concluding part of this article focuses on those systematic considerations and distinctions that are crucial for our aim to arrive at a position where the untenability of the traditional opposition between individual and society is transcended. The second part of our assessment will investigate the contributions of Sztompka, Habermas and Giddens before the 'category-mistake' in the said opposition is elucidated.*

**Keywords:** Individualism; holism; life-world; complex basic concepts; communal and coordinational relationships; differentiated social identities

## Broadening the context

A number of foundational arguments and distinctions have been introduced in two prior articles, respectively investigating the themes: *Is it meaningful to juxtapose 'individual' and 'society'?* and: *Transcending the impasse of individualism and universalism in sociological theory.*

It has turned out that the dominant opposing theoretical positions are given in *atomistic* (individualistic) and *holistic* (universalistic) orientations – and that these opposing views ultimately proceed from one-sided emphases on constitutive features within the structure of the social aspect of reality. This line of argumentation had to question key elements operative within the broader intellectual legacy of the West during the past five centuries, particularly the all-pervasive influence of modern *nominalism* that effectively eliminated any *order for* and *orderliness of* within the universe (outside the human 'mind'). We have pointed out that this nominalistic heritage reached its rationalistic peak in the thought of

1. See *Society in Transition*, 2002;33(1):96-115 and *Society in Transition*, 2004, 35(1):165-182.

Immanuel Kant, who elevated human understanding to the (a priori) *formal* law-giver of nature.<sup>2</sup> But then, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the *irrationalistic* leg of nominalism gained the upper hand in the emergence of *historicism* and the *linguistic turn*.<sup>3</sup>

The effect of this development was that ontic normative conditions were transposed to and viewed as the *product of human construction*. Sociological theorising transformed the Kantian and neo-Kantian dualism between 'is' and 'ought to be' (*Sein* and *Sollen*) into a *separation* of (a-normative) factual social reality ('structures', 'systems') and the (subjectively constituted) domain of *meanings, norms, values* and *beliefs* – captured by the general basket-category *culture*. Whereas the initial position of the Baden School of neo-Kantianism (Windelband, Rickert, Weber, and others) still held on to supposedly *ideal* and *timeless* values, the latter soon became fully *historicised* and *relativised* through the emerging idea of *changing lingual* and *social constructions*. And within this picture the radically opposing perspectives of *sociological individualism* and *sociological universalism* continued an intellectual dilemma dating back far beyond modernity.

Although Callicles<sup>4</sup> and Protagoras<sup>5</sup> pursued the path of *individualism* already in Ancient Greek culture, the societal wisdom of Greek philosophy culminated in the (*universalistic*) ideal of the city-state, the *polis*, which was supposed to be the all-encompassing *totality* of society, leading the citizen to *moral* perfection. During the medieval era, the attempted synthesis of Greek culture and biblical Christianity led Roman Catholicism further on the universalistic path by superimposing upon the state (with its ideal of moral perfection) the church as a supernatural institute of *grace* – thus not only expanding the idea of the *societas perfecta* (perfect society) but also incorporating it in the *Corpus Christianum* view of the church which is supposed to complement moral perfection (the natural portal) with (supernatural) *eternal bliss*.<sup>6</sup>

At this point the Renaissance era emerged, co-determined by the rise of modern *nominalism* (John the Scott, William of Ockham). This latter movement challenged the conception of eternal (platonian) forms in God's Mind as well as the hierarchical structure of the ecclesiastically unified medieval culture. Secular humanism enthroned the supposedly autonomously free human personality, asserting its authority by implementing a natural

2. Keep in mind that Kant operated with the idea of subjective (a priori) conditions thought to have objective (i.e. universal) validity for possible 'objects' of knowledge. Our own approach realised that such an approach never escaped from the jump from subjective conditions of thought to the universality of objective conditions (see Kant, 1787-B:122 where he addresses this problem). It acknowledges the *ontic* nature of modal aspect, co-conditioning both human thinking about social realities and the *social* itself.
3. Irrationalism plays an important role in the way in which Smart analyses postmodern social theory. It is supposed to challenge the charisma of modern reason, criticise identity thinking and questions the conceptualisation of totality (Smart, 2000:447 ff.).
4. In his 'aristocratic nominalism' Callicles derives from nature the right of the strongest. He opposes the legal order of the state because it only serves to suppress the strongest through the making of laws. He, therefore, admires the tyrant because the latter breaks through positive laws and subjects the weak to its power as law (in a sense anticipating ideas about 'superman' formulated much later by Nietzsche in the nineteenth century). The tyrant alone is entitled to have rights – all the citizens are deprived of any rights and subject to the arbitrariness of the tyrant – this time anticipating the position taken by Hobbes in his *Leviathan* (1651).

scientific (mathematical-physical) mode of analysis – proceeding step-by-step from the simplest elements to the more complex levels. This new natural science ideal, called forth by the ideal of a free and autonomous personality, inspired the reconstruction of human society from its ‘simplest elements’, its ‘atoms’, the *individuals*. Social contract theory by and large followed this atomistic clue, except for Rousseau who started his contract theory in an *atomistic* way, but then allows the contract to produce a moral-collective whole in a typical *universalistic* fashion (the ‘body politic’, the ‘*volonté générale*’).<sup>7</sup>

Yet the dominant spirit of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the era of the *Enlightenment*, was one of a *rationalistic individualism*. Early Romanticism reverted to an *irrationalistic individualism* – but the anarchistic consequences of such a position soon inspired an *irrationalistic universalism* where each transpersonal community is viewed as a law just for itself (the so-called transpersonalist, freedom-idealism of Schelling, Fichte and Hegel). Western civilization here witnessed for the first time the modern *ideology of community* – further explored in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by *Nazism* and *Fascism*.

In the meantime the tremendously historically significant *industrial revolution* took place. Yet, owing to the guidance of the classical liberal idea of the state (John Locke) and the classical school of economics (Adam Smith) – *laissez-faire*, *laissez-passer*, the newly emerging industrial societies abstained from protecting the *economic legal interests* of the workers and thus gave birth to the labour movements which eventually, through trade unions, entered the political scene in the form of political parties (labour parties) directed at the *sectional interests of labourers* – and thus rendered a ‘service’ to the genesis of the prominent totalitarian régimes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (with their universalist ideologies – in the Italy of Mussolini and Germany of Hitler), finally resulting in the *Second World War* that forced those Western states with a democratic legacy to enter into this war as well.

From the preceding brief sketch it is clear that the opposition of *individualism* and *universalism* constitutes more than a theoretically contested issue –

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5. Protagoras elaborated the Greek nominalistic movement by viewing the human person as being in a constantly changing state that cannot be grasped in any *fixed form* or *measure* (every individual is his or her own measure). Only the *polis*, as bearer of the Greek motive of form, measure and harmony, is capable of supplying the human being with a cultural garb through education and obedience to positive laws. This explains why he holds that human beings, coming from a condition in nature where the state is absent, have those properties necessary for the formation of a state – but not on the basis of a ‘social contract’ (see Menzel 1929 and 1936). Although Protagoras proceeds from a nominalistic individualistic starting point, his conception of the state does not acknowledge any material boundaries for the competence of the state – even morality and religion are viewed as products of the existence of the state.
  6. The persistence of this view is still found in the famous papal encyclical, *Quadragesimo anno* (15 May 1931), where it is explicitly stated: ‘Surely the church does not only have the task to bring the human person merely to a transient and deficient happiness, for it must carry a person to eternal bliss’ (cf. Schnatz, 1973:403).
  7. With *law* turned into an expression of the *general will* manifesting itself only within the state, Rousseau – in spite of his apparent intention to secure individual and societal freedoms – succumbed to a totalitarian and absolutistic view where those who are not conforming to the general will (which is supposed to their own will – since freedom is defined as obedience to a law that we have prescribed to ourselves) will be ‘forced to be free’ (‘... ce qui ne signifie autre chose sinon qu'on le forcera à être libre’; Rousseau, 1975:246).

it cuts across the significant contours of the development of Western civilization and societies themselves.<sup>8</sup>

Clearly, the relationship between 'individual' and 'society' constitutes a theoretical and a practical concern. Therefore it is all the more important to attempt to arrive at a satisfactory theoretical understanding of this issue.

## The social and 'being-an-individual'

A key element in our preceding articles is found in the acknowledgement of the ontic status of the different modes (functions) of reality, including the *social aspect*. In addition we have argued that a person primarily is not an 'abstract individual' who only in the second place participates in the 'social'. Since *all* modal aspects of reality *co-condition* whatever (concretely) functions within them, *being individual* is equally dependent upon and made possible by every unique and irreducible functional mode of reality. Traditional views of the human person diverged because they attempted to highlight *being human* solely from the perspective of *one* (or a combination of some) modal aspects. Greek antiquity, medieval Scholasticism and modern philosophy (each in their own way), for example, assumed the rational-moral nature of being human. The idea that the human being is distinguished by its *intellect* is still found in the modern classification of the human being as *homo sapiens*. Post-Enlightenment historicism accentuated the *historicity* of being human and postmodernism its *linguisticity* (hermeneutics). Classical economic theory created the idea of the *homo economicus* (Robinson Crusoe). The crucial point to be observed is that the individual human being indeed has a concrete function within each aspect of reality without being absorbed by any one of them. A brief overview of these actual functions of an individual within all the modal aspects will confirm this claim. The human person is one (numerical function), occupies a certain location (space), moves (kinematical), is strong or weak (acts – physical), lives (functions biotically), feels (the sensitive function), thinks, deliberates and decides (logical-analytical function), moulds history and forms cultural objects (cultural-historical function), speaks (lingual function), socialises (social function), buys and sells and acts in frugal or wasteful ways (economic function), is beautiful or ugly (aesthetic function), observes (or does not observe) the rights of others (jural function), loves or hates fellow human beings (ethical or moral function) and has the capacity to trust (self-confidence and reliance on fellow human beings) (the certitudinal function).

In the light of this *multi-aspectual* nature of being human, every statement taking on a totalizing 'is' format – such as 'a person **is** a physical being', 'a person **is** an historical being', 'a person **is** a social being', 'a person **is** a lingual being (*homo symbolicus*)' and so on, therefore does not realise the *being human* is more than the mere function a person may have in anyone of these (ontic) des of reality. For this reason we have emphasised that *being individual* is made possible by every unique and irreducible aspect of reality in which a person functions. Furthermore, this insight justifies the employment of the qualification given, namely that each aspect merely 'co-conditions' the many-sided human existence.

The implication is extremely important for a deepened understanding of the juxtapositioning of 'individual' and 'society': the many-sided existence of an individual is *never*

8. Elements of the above sketched historical contours are also discussed by Min-Sun, 2002:10-13.

exhausted by any aspect of reality in which human beings function. Stated differently: every *individual* in its totality exceeds the confines of each and every modal aspect co-conditioning its existence. We have noted that already in the social contract theories of the early modern period – amongst others Hobbes, Thomasius, Pufendorf, Locke and Rousseau – the fictional abstraction of ‘isolated’ individuals is postulated in order to give a *hypothetical* (and therefore not *historical*) account of the existing order within known societies – as if human individuals are only in a derived sense incorporated in social interaction. With good reason George Herbert Mead reacted to this abstraction by emphasising that the social context (co-)determines human existence from the very outset (Mead, 1967:144 ff.).

In order to appreciate the contribution of Mead the direct functional foundation of the social aspect, found in the sign-mode, should be acknowledged. This aspect is characterised by *expressive signification* and its foundational position in respect of the social aspect implies that language (qualified by the sign-mode) is a pre-requisite for social interaction. Furthermore, the social aspect points backwards (retroicipates) to the sign-mode in the reality of the social expressions and social interpretations of social subjects. Symbolical signification is indeed a constitutive (retroicipatory) analogical moment within the structure of the social aspect. Although Searle approaches this issue on the basis of the general shift to language as a new horizon during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fashion in which he articulates his argument approximates the above mentioned position very closely:

The primary aim of this chapter is to explain and justify my claim that language is essentially constitutive of institutional reality (Searle, 1995: 59).

According to Mead the ‘biological individual’ could only develop a *mind* and a *self* through a *social process* (Mead, 1967:1). According to him we received from Wundt a most valuable distinction, namely that between *gesture* and *social acts*. A gesture only later on becomes a *symbol* though as such it is already present in the initial phases of a *social action* (Mead, 1967:42). The term ‘gesture’ may be identified with these beginnings of social acts which are stimuli for the response of other forms (Mead, 1967:43).

If we see a dangerous animal ready to attack, we know it without being able to say whether the animal itself *means* it in the sense of being *determined*, on the basis of prior reflection, *to attack*. However, if someone would swing her fist in front of your face you surely suppose that she means something, that there is an idea behind the gesture:

When, now, that gesture *means* this idea behind it and arouses that idea in the other individual, then we have a *significant symbol*. In the case of the dog-fight we have a gesture which calls our appropriate response; in the present case we have a *symbol* which answers the *meaning* in the experience of the first individual and which also calls out the meaning in the second individual (Mead, 1967:45-46).

At this point the gesture becomes *language* – it becomes a meaningful symbol designating a certain meaning (Mead, 1967:46). Mead emphasises that ‘significant symbols’ are to be seen as ‘gestures which possess meanings and are hence more than mere substitute stimuli’ (Mead, 1967:75). As such the body is not a self: ‘it becomes a self only when it has developed a mind within the context of social experience’ (Mead, 1967:50). He explicitly states: ‘selves must be accounted for in terms of the social process’ (Mead, 1967:49).

Mead holds that complementary to the elements of constraint present in the social process an 'I' emerges as distinct from the 'self.' He relates the phases of development of the 'self' to play, to the game and to the 'generalized other' (Mead, 1967:152-164). If persons observe themselves in abstraction from the perspective of the generalised other, they in fact subject themselves to the effect of demands laid upon them by some or other social institution – and thus experience a form a *behavioral control*.

It is in the form of the generalised other that the social process enters as a determining factor into the individual's thinking (Mead, 1967:155). But in his discussion of the 'I' Mead opposes it to the 'social me' (Mead, 1967:173). However, the question in respect of the 'individual-society' problem is: 'Does he locate the "I" in a different dimension of reality, or is he simply in search of a different modal perspective?'

What is required by others is met through the *social self*. Yet the 'own' action in a situation comes from the 'I' and it is more or less uncertain (Mead, 1967:177). Mead finally sees the 'I' and the 'me' merely as phases of the 'self' (Mead, 1967:192 ff.). The 'I' reacts to the 'self' that originates from the acceptance of the attitudes of others:

Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the 'me' and we react to it as an 'I' (Mead, 1967:174).

Mead here introduces a distinction between the *present* and the *past* – the 'I' of the *present* is found in the 'me' of the *next moment*:

'I' become a 'me' in so far as I remember what I said ... It is because of the 'I' that we say we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our action. It is as we act that we are aware of ourselves. It is in memory that the 'I' is constantly present in experience (Mead, 1967:174).

As that what is given the 'I' is of course a 'me,' even if the latter was the 'I' of an earlier moment. The basic denominator used by Mead in this context is clearly seen from his words

If you ask, then, where directly in your own experience that 'I' comes in, the answer is that it comes in as a *historical* (my emphasis – DFMS) figure (Mead, 1967:174).

Thus Mead created a serious problem, for the 'self', which is essentially *socially* constituted, falls apart in the two phases of the 'social self', namely the 'I' and the 'me'. While this split partially abolishes the *social unity* of the 'self', as an historical figure the 'I'(-self) is no longer *social* in nature. What is more is that within a social context the 'me'(-self) is transposed to the *past*. Does the social dimension of reality still share in the present? If the 'I'-self is merely a *phase* of the total unity of the *social self*, then the social, in this regard, has to participate in the historical present – a privilege explicitly reserved for the 'I'. The dispersion of the 'self' into an *historically present* 'I'-self and socially bygone 'my'-self is dialectically re-united in the heterogenous unity of the 'social self'. Both these (dialectically opposed) elements, namely the 'I' and the 'me', are, according to Mead 'essential to the self in its full expression' (Mead, 1967:199). Clearly, Mead's symbolic interactionism terminated in a *dispersion* of the human person into dialectically opposed modal functions (the historical and the social) – without being able to account for the insight that *being human* transcends any of its modal functions.

Although sociological theory may explore the useful metaphor of 'playing different roles' within society, explicitly advanced by the *dramaturgical school*, this perspective merely emphasises the factual *unity in the multiplicity* in the *social functioning* of every human being.<sup>9</sup>

By looking briefly at the contrast between animal 'Umwelten' and the human (social) life-world we may obtain helpful perspectives for this *unity in the multiplicity of human social functioning*.

### The human (social) life-world versus an animal 'Umwelt'

Portmann considers the animal nature to be assured through instincts and to be bound by an environment (Portmann, 1969:86). Animals experience reality exclusively out of their natural inclination, directed at that which is physically, biotically and psychic-sensitively important to them. Animals experience reality in terms of that which is *negotiable* and *not negotiable*, *edible* and *inedible*, in terms of *same sex* and *opposite sex*, *comforting* and *alarming*. J. Von Uexküll illustrated the environmental (Umwelt-) restriction of the animal by means of his oak tree example: 'Each Umwelt isolates out of the oak tree a particular part ... In all the various Umwelten of its various inhabitants the same oak plays a widely divergent role, sometimes with particular and then again with none of its parts. The same part can be large or small, the same wood hard and soft, it can serve as a means of shelter or attack' (Von Uexküll, 1970:98, 100; see also Von Uexküll, 1970, 1970a and 1973). Human experience of the oak tree transcends these natural aspects of reality to which animal experience is restricted. The natural scientist sees the tree as an object of analytical study, the hiker as something with a particular aesthetic attraction, the criminal as a hiding place from the law, the woodworker as material from which to make furniture, and so forth. This human experiential perspective with its rich variety is linked to a person's cultural calling which enables a person to be variably settled in any environment by means of cultural formation.

Portmann acknowledges these limitations in his mentioned characterisation of them as *Umweltgebunden* (constrained by environment) and *Instinktgesichert* (protected by instinct) (see Portmann, 1969:86 and Portmann, 1990:79).<sup>10</sup>

Human functioning is neither completely determined by instincts, nor is it limited to only one 'Umwelt', simply because the whole bodily existence of human beings is directed towards and is guided by *normatively qualified* view-points (i.e. by the capacity of human beings to function accountably within the normative aspects of reality) (see Altner, G. & Hofer, 1972). The tremendous flexibility of human functioning executed within these normative aspects of reality makes it possible for human society to develop up to a level with *far-reaching forms of differentiation* and *specialisation*, expressed in the multiple roles

9. In line with his pre-occupation with metaphors from aesthetic life (poems and dramas), Goffman sees our performance in front of other people as the taking on of different roles in front of an audience. In this regard the human mind undergoes a certain 'bureaucratization' and is subjected to a certain social discipline (Goffman, 1959:56, 57)

10. See Von Bertalanffy's explanation of the famous tick example of Von Uexküll in Von Bertalanffy, 1973:241. See also the squirrel example of instinctive behaviour discussed by Eibl-Eibesfeldt (2004:57).

which any person in such a society can assume. Simpson correctly stresses this point: 'Such specialisation, which is non-genetic, requires individual flexibility and could not occur in a mainly instinctive animal' (Simpson, 1969:90).

Hart states it with concise clarity:

A worker ant is just that – and all its functions are geared to being a worker ant. A human being, on the other hand, has multiple roles to play and is not exhausted in any of them (Hart, 1984:146).

However, this human-spiritual flexibility is dependent on a relatively unspecialised bio-psychical basis and foundation.<sup>11</sup> Human beings share multiple differentiated societal spheres and precisely in doing that they differ fundamentally from animals with their non-overlapping 'Umwelten'.

Portmann points out that Jakob von Uexküll neglects the fact that all these different (human) 'Weltansichten' (world perspectives) share a communal species world which enables a mutual understanding as well as an interaction on the basis of opposing views. The communal world in which human beings live constitutes a shared domain which is not even fragmented by the most severe differences in potential or cultural traditions. The term 'Umwelt' should therefore be reserved for the separation of the different worlds of animal species, but it should not be applied to different ways in which human beings view the world (Portmann, 1970:XIV).

The crucial question now is: how does one understand the multiple social roles of human beings within society while holding on to the insight that none of them exhausts the meaning of being human? This question inevitably points us towards the structure and meaning of the social aspect of reality and to some of the compound or complex basic concepts of the discipline of sociology.

Our subsequent analysis below acknowledges that the following ontic aspects are *foundational* to the social aspect of reality (taken in their reverse order): the lingual (sign-) mode; the cultural-historical; the logical-analytical; the sensitive-psychical; the biotical, the physical, the kinematical, the spatial and the numerical aspects. We have highlighted all the provisionally distinguished aspects of reality in the above summary analysis of the concrete functions human beings have within each ontic mode of existence.

## Forms of social interaction

Once the existence of the *social aspect* of reality is acknowledged and it is understood that alongside all other modal aspects also the social mode has an ontic meaning – in the sense that it conditions and make possible whatever we can experience as *social relationships* and *social interaction*, sociology as a discipline (implicitly or explicitly) has to come to terms with an understanding of the multiple different ways in which humans interact within society. Our analysis in this and the next paragraph intends to arrive at a systematic account of such a classification by first of all entering into an assessment of the position taken in this regard by some classical sociologists. This assessment will emphasise the fact that any

11. Gehlen analyses the *unspecialised* nature of the human body extensively (see Gehlen, 1971:86 ff.), while Altner and Hofer dedicated a whole work to the uniqueness of being human (see Altner & Hofer, 1972).

attempt to *classify* social interaction inevitably employs certain elementary basic concepts of sociology. Yet our contention is to show that a sociological (theoretical) account of different forms of social interaction needs to be articulated in terms of what we will (below) designate as the *complex* or *compound* basic concepts of sociology. Once this has been done, an expanded perspective will be available in terms of which we will finally be able to assess what is inappropriate in the opposition of 'individual' and 'society'.

The aim of this analysis is to further elucidate the fact that envisaging an individual human being contains an element of *non-differentiation*, a perspective of the totality of human existence, and that precisely for this reason every possible classification of social forms of life operates on a level that is incomparable to 'being individual' (this will form part of the focus of *Part II* of our closing analysis). What immediately follows will turn out to be crucial for the development of a perspective transcending the juxta-positioning of individual and society.

The focus on the *social aspect* does open up important considerations in this regard, because the meaning of this aspect, as we have seen, can only come to expression in its *coherence* with other aspects (see Strauss, 2004: 175 ff.). Our initial definition of individualism (atomism) and universalism (holism) explored two (mutually irreducible) analogical elements within the modal structure of the social aspect, namely *numerical* and *spatial* analogies. The meaning of the social is dependent upon the (quantitative) meaning of the *one* and the *many* and also upon the primary spatial connotation of *wholeness* (*totality*). It is only when these two (irreducible but mutually cohering) elements are (theoretically) torn apart and *reified* that sociological thought inevitably gets entangled in (mutually exclusive) *atomistic* or *holistic* positions.

These two extremes are responses to the task of accounting for the interconnections between (what has been called) 'individual and society'. We now want to argue that in order to escape from this *impasse* one has to enter into an analysis of some *compound basic concepts* of sociology, namely those emerging when the different ways in which human beings engage in social interaction are the focus of our attention. For that reason we now first of all proceed by considering the classification of *forms of social interaction* found in the thought of some of the sociological classics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It will turn out that because we have to employ different elementary basic concepts at once in order to perform the classificatory task at hand, a compound or complex analysis is required. Let us commence by using the perspective of the *biotal analogy* (see Strauss, 2002: 109 ff.). It entails that the social intercourse between people living in a *differentiated* society always occur within *integrated* spheres of life, with their 'own inner laws' (see Münch 1990).<sup>12</sup> Does this mean that there is no room left for the *personal freedom* of *social subjects*? Do we have to accept the contrast between 'action' and 'order' (see Alexander 1987, 1988 and 1990) or 'agency' and 'structure' (Giddens – see *Part II* of our concluding articles) as a strict either/or? What about the numerous less fixed and less durable relationships where people interact on an equal footing – be it in cooperation or in competition – with and against each other? These kinds of interaction are often *purely incident-*

12. Habermas speaks in a different context explicitly about the 'own laws' of 'specific social spheres' ('den sogenannten Eigengesetzlichkeiten einzelner sozialer Sphären' – 1995-2:437).

tal (short-lived).

A consistent individualism, that wants to explore the perspective of 'individuals-in-interaction', proceeds from a notion of action that *denies* the inherent *social function* of any human action. The only option left on the basis of this assumption is then to *add* the *social* dimension afterwards as something *foreign* and *different*. As soon as we acknowledge the embracing *transcendental* nature of every modal aspect of reality, we have to start from a notion of the social function of reality which is *co-constitutive* for all the *actions* of whatever *individual* human beings. All the less durable relationships referred to above are therefore already entailed in the mere fact that individuals *function* in the social aspect as well. As a structural element co-conditioned by the way in which human beings function within reality, inter-individual interactions are, in a truly *transcendental* sense, just as 'social' as are the existence of any (supra-individual) *societal wholes*.

### Distinguishing forms of social interaction by some prominent sociologists

*Tönnies, Sorokin and Maclver*

Any *genetic* distinction between these two kinds of social functioning, such as intended by Tönnies between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, should therefore be questioned. We have remarked that initially he understood this distinction in historical-genetic terms – a period of *Gesellschaft* (society) follows a period of *Gemeinschaft* (community) (Tönnies, 1965:251). However, in his *Introduction to Sociology* it turns out that he wants to relativise these oppositions. He remarks that in addition to *social relations* and *social connections* he distinguishes a third category, *Samtschaften* (collectives). Social entities are classified as *Samtschaften*, social relationships (*Verhältnisse*), and social 'bodies' or organisations (*Körperschaften*) (Tönnies, 1965:XLV ff.).

Only a few analogical concepts are used in this classification of Tönnies. He starts with the *numerical analogy* by first of all looking at a *social multiplicity* combined into a *social unity* – designated as a *corporation* or *organisation* (*Körperschaft*). These two terms, *corporation* and *organisation*, remind us of the original meaning of the *biotical* aspect. On the basis of a subdivision of the human will into an artificial *rational* part and an *organic-psychic bodily part* he then uses the *physical* and *biotical* analogies to characterise the difference between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.

The principal category used to designate the nature of *Gemeinschaft* comes from the biotical aspect: *organic*. *Gesellschaft* is described in kinematical-physical terms: it is seen as a *mechanical aggregate*. The *logical analogy* implicitly surfaces inasmuch as Tönnies wants to classify *mutually affirmative* relationships. More recent sociological thinkers subsumed these relationships under the notion of *social consensus* (concord). Tönnies did not want to incorporate *social conflict* in his perspective. In their *Introduction* to this work of Tönnies, Loomis and McKinney mention that according to Tönnies sociology has the task to 'point the way to the establishment of peaceful human relationships among groups, classes, and nations' (see Loomis & McKinney, 1957:10-11).

Sorokin is convinced that this classification, as advanced by Tönnies, is inadequate, since it does not consider the role of *social conflict*. Without discussing the inherent anti-normativity incorporated in social conflict, Sorokin wants to use it in a *positive* way in his

classification of forms of social interaction (Sorokin, 1962:106 ff., 113). He uses the opposition between *solidarity* and *antagonism* – both *sensitive-psychic* phenomena in their original modal meaning – to serve as a basis for his classification of *social interaction*. Forms of social interaction where *solidarity* dominates are called *familistic* (Sorokin, 1962:99 ff.); forms of social interaction where both *solidarity* and *antagonism* appear are called *mixed* or *contractual* (Sorokin, 1962:102 ff.); whereas predominant antagonistic forms are classified as *compulsory* (Sorokin, 1962:106 ff.). That the *familistic type* closely resembles the *Gemeinschaft*-form of Tönnies is clear from his statement:

The familistic relationship *eliminates or reduces to the minimum the feeling of being a stranger or outsider among its members*. It is the relationship in which the whole life of each member in all its important aspects and values tends to be merged into a warm and hearty collective 'we' (Sorokin, 1962:101).

The particular emphasis which Sorokin places on the sensitive-psychic analogies of *solidarity* and *antagonism* in social interaction – sometimes combined with *love* and *hate* – distorts the equally important contribution provided by other analogical structural moments. For example, the *spatial* and *historical* analogies are completely relativised in his 'familistic type.' He even wants to deprive intimate relationships within the (nuclear) family from every possible structure of authority (super- and subordination).<sup>13</sup> This is partly due to the negative connotation attached by him to the distinction between *office-bearers* and those *subjected* to their authority:

... in a truly familistic interaction or group, ... there is no formal *domination and subordination*, no master and servant, no arbitrary government and suppressed subjects (Sorokin, 1962:100-101).

The distinctions found in the work of Maclver and Page highlights the important distinction between condition and being conditioned.

The first basic concept introduced by Maclver and Page is that of *society*:

Society is a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions, of controls of human behaviour and of liberties. This ever-changing, complex system we call a society. It is the web of social relationships. And it is always changing (Maclver and Page, 1965:5).

This circumscription implicitly draws upon some of the analogical basic concepts of sociology: *authority*, *control* and *mutual aid* are cultural-historical analogies; *divisions* makes an appeal to the spatial aspect; while expressions such as *groups* and *human behaviour* refer to the entitary dimension of reality functioning in principle in all aspects. One of the striking shortcomings of this description is, furthermore, that it only concentrates on *variable factual* (sometimes: observable) *social relationships*, without any recognition of the underlying *normative structural conditions* which make all *factual societal phenomena* as such possible in the first place.

The next basic concept introduced by Maclver and Page is that of *community*. When a group of people – for example a village, a city, a tribe or a nation – collectively participates

13. By contrast Giddens identifies ordering relations of authority within all societies with the 'political' (Giddens, 1986:34) – thus implicitly denying *non-political* relations of super- and subordination.

in the 'basic conditions of a common life', it is known as a *community* (Maclver and Page, 1965:8-9). The foundation of a community is found in a locality or territorium as well as in a communal sentiment (Maclver and Page, 1965:9-10). Their comprehensive final description reads: 'A community then is an area of social living marked by some degree of social coherence' (Maclver and Page, 1965:9).

This result merely uses a few modal elementary basic concepts – causing it, due to this vague generality, to lack a significant distinctive value. *Social coherence* (a spatial analogy within the structure of the social aspect evincing the *internal coherence* between these two aspects), and *social locality* (area – i.e., the *external coherence* between the social and the spatial aspects), combined with a *communal sentiment* (sensitive-psychical analogy) could only be specified fully when all other elementary basic concepts are included in our analysis as well. A similar shortcoming hampers their definition of a *group*. A group is constituted by any collection of individuals entering into specific social relations with each other such that these relations imply mutuality without the presence of a conscious organisation (Maclver and Page, 1965:14-15).

Of course the most fundamental approach to the analogical moments in the structure of an aspect should concentrate on number and space, because all the other modal aspects of reality are founded on these two most basic aspects of reality: a social collection points at a certain *number* of social subjects, while the term *relations* (in: social relations) first of all appeals to the aspect of space (relation = connectedness, coherence).<sup>14</sup> Given this 'elementary' numerical and spatial basis, Maclver and Page then proceed by *adding* further analogical terms to reach a more specified characterisation of *different* groups:

If we are considering something as an organised *group*, it is an association; if as a form of *procedure*, it is an institution. Association denotes membership; institution denotes a mode or means of service (Maclver and Page, 1965:16).

The term *organise* is connected with the biotical and the cultural-historical analogies, while the expression *mode or means of service* is multivocal. Generally it is related to the cultural-historical aspect where the *formative control* of persons is often used in service of specific modal qualifications. The question is after all: what are the *kinds of procedural forms* or *procedural conditions* we have in mind as characteristic of the activities of a group?

The mere (theoretical) idea of a differentiated societal sphere ('form of life') acquires a first level of specification through the elementary basic concepts of sociology. First of all such a societal sphere could be characterised by describing it as a *societal unity*. The perspective of the spatial analogy additionally enables us to say that the unity of such a form of life could be seen as a *social whole* or *social totality*. This analogical structural moment actually also enables us to speak of the specific *social domain* of a particular *societal sphere*. With the aid of the kinematical analogy we can account for the awareness of the *social continuity (constancy)* of such a life-form – providing the basis for *social changes* taking place within it (the focus of the physical analogy).

Modern system theory (founded by Von Bertalanffy) realized that the second main law

14. The Annual Yearbook of modern states normally implicitly affirms the foundational position of the numerical and the spatial aspects for first of all they specify their population (*number* of inhabitants) and secondly the *size* of the country concerned.

of thermo-dynamics, the law of non-decreasing entropy, was formulated for *closed* systems only. In this formulation it was therefore not capable of accounting for the physical aspect of living entities. Only after this law had been generalised by Von Bertalanffy was it possible to understand why living entities can build up more and more internal order without violating the second law. Living entities in fact cause more disorder in their environments through extracting order from it than the order generated within themselves. For that reason the physicist Schrödinger published a work on the physical aspect of the cell in which he explained that living entities feed on 'negentropy' (see Schrödinger, 1955:71 ff.) Von Bertalanffy points out that the dynamic pseudo-equilibrium of living entities is kept constant at a certain distance from true equilibrium enabling it to perform work while requiring continuous import of energy for maintaining the distance from true equilibrium. His German term for this *steady state* is 'Fließgleichgewicht' (see Von Bertalanffy, 1973:133). An idling car, a glacier and a burning flame are all instances of thermo-dynamically open systems, i.e. systems of which the identity and persistence over time is not eliminated by the continual exchange of their constituting elements. Likewise the *continuous change* present in the on-going functioning of societal forms of life – allowing the individual members of that sphere of social life to come and go without terminating its persistence over time – analogically reflects the thermo-dynamics of *physically open systems*.

On the basis of acknowledging the *identity* of social collectivities over time, notwithstanding the coming and going of their individual members, a given society may experience social growth (social differentiation and integration), implying that a specific societal collectivity can acquire yet another specification in terms of the biotic analogy within the structure of the social aspect, namely when it is not only recognised as persisting over time in spite of on-going changes taking place within it, but also seen as a differentiated social whole capable of integrating its social activities over time. This persistence may require the operation of social *organs* competent to accomplish this through an ability to structure societal relationships by means of exercising their *social ordering will* in such a way that the internal functioning of the life-form concerned could express itself in constructive manifestations of an integrated social solidarity and social awareness (sensitivity/consciousness). Clearly this formulation in addition employs the (analogical) meaning of the sensitive mode of reality. The degree to which *social consensus* or *social conflict* prevails in a particular social sphere (logical-analytical analogy) is often dependent upon the way in which office-bearers *control* the situation on the basis of a proper *interpretation* of the *signs* of conflict.<sup>15</sup>

## Classifying forms of social interaction: complex basic concepts of sociology

The coherence between the kinematical and the physical analogies in the structure of the social aspect helps us to identify a property that could be denoted as a *solidary unitary*

15. Notions of social power, authority and control analogically reflect the coherence with the cultural-historical function, whereas social signs, social symbols and social interpretation analogically refer to the sign-mode (lingual mode).

*character* of certain social forms of life. This feature intends to capture the phenomenon that in spite of the *constant flow* (coming and going/entering and leaving) of individual members of a societal collectivity, the durability (persistence) and identity of the social life-form concerned are not destroyed. Ryan fittingly captures this trait:

There are regularities and constancies in the behavior of groups of people which allow us to talk about groups having a stable structure in spite of fluctuating membership, and about the existence of social roles which can be filled by different people at different points in time (Ryan, 1970: 174).

We want to argue that every one of the constitutive modal analogies within the structure of the social aspect is required to fully explain the meaning of the *solidary unitary character* of those social forms of life displaying this feature – and not only the *kinematical* and *physical* analogies. We can only identify a *solidary unitary character* if an *integrated social order* is given positive *shape* within the *sphere* of a particular social *totality* in spite of the presence of possible or actual social conflict (the numerical, spatial, biotical, analytical, and cultural-historical analogies). Let us now differentiate, within the context of the *spatial* analogy, between social relations of *next-to-each-other* and social relations of *super- and subordination*, and then select a relation of *super- and subordination*. In this case we have to combine our perspective on the *solidary unitary character* with the presence of durable relations of authority (of super- and subordination – compare the cultural-historical analogy of *social competence* = power over persons vested in an *office*). This choice provides us with a second basic *attribute* pertaining to the different forms of social interaction in a differentiated society: a *permanent authority structure* (structure of super- and subordination). The full meaning of this feature is also co-constituted by the other analogical moments within the structure of the social aspect.

The durable organisation of any social form of life receives its *maximum specification* when it shares in *both* these mentioned characteristics:

- (i) a *solidary unitary character*, and
- (ii) a *permanent authority structure*.

The Dutch (and German) term denoting this form of social interaction is '*verband*'. Unfortunately the English language has no suitable *translational equivalent* for this word. One may attempt to capture its connotation by introducing the term *consociation*, but perhaps the best option is simply to speak about *social collectivities* when '*verbande*' are intended. *Social collectivities* then, as a compound basic concept of sociology, refer to all those forms of social interaction which exhibit both features (i) and (ii). Examples of *social collectivities* are the *state*, the *church*, the *firm*, the *school*, the *university*, the (nuclear) *family*, the *art association*, the *sports association*, the *cultural association* and the *language association*. The state possesses a durable super- and subordination of authority and subjects (i.e. a *permanent authority structure*), while the unity and identity of a state is not abolished by the exchange of its citizens (either office-bearers or subjects). The same applies for all the other societal collectivities that we have named in the list of examples.

When societal life-forms possess only one of these characteristics, the term *communities* may serve as an appropriate designation. A *nation* ('volk'/'people') and the *extended family* possess a *solidary unitary character* (that is why there may be continuity between a nation of a hundred years ago and of today in the midst of changes), but *no permanent*

*authority structure* can be indicated. The *marriage community* does possess a permanent authority structure, although a solidary unitary character is absent. In terms of these distinctions neither a state, nor a province, nor a rural town is a *community*. With reference to the state-side of the given facts, we are working with (higher or lower) forms of governmental authority – and therefore with subordinate and superordinate relations which are absent from the kinds of communities as described. In reality a city and a town exhibit an (enkaptic)<sup>16</sup> interweaving of diverse societal collectivities, communities and what should be called *coordinational relationships* – lacking both properties (i) and (ii) mentioned above. The expression *coordinational relationships* intends to reflect what is meant by the Dutch term ‘*maatschap*.’ This Dutch term ‘*maatschap*’ also does not have a suitable English equivalent. The intended kind of relationship surely does not have a *permanent authority structure*, nor does it possess a *solidary unitary character*. It concerns social interaction normally related to phenomena of friendship, partnership, fellowship, mate, pal, peer, and the freedom we have to *associate* with an accountable freedom of choice. For the lack of a better alternative, we want to apply the proposed designation *coordinational* to include those connotations shared by the phenomena referred to in the previous sentence – which are all instances of coordinational relationships.

However, coordinational relationships do not solely concern the inter-relationships between individuals, since they also embrace those relations on an equal footing prevailing between different *communities* and *social collectivities*.

Specified in this way, the distinction between *coordinational*, *communal* and *collective* forms of social interaction remains confined to the *modal structure of the social aspect as such*. These three forms of social interaction are therefore *modal totality concepts*, i.e. complex (compound) basic concepts formed by employing the foundational (constitutive) modal analogies within the structure of the social aspect.

This distinction between coordinational, communal and collective social relationships explicitly disregards the *more-than-social* totality structure of societal wholes. It means that the typical totality structure of social life-forms is ignored in such a way that no account is taken of their characteristic and distinctive functions – designated as their *foundational* and their *qualifying* functions (see Dooyeweerd, 1997-III:90-91; 128 ff.; 404 ff.; 536 ff.).

## **The correlation between social collectivities and communal relationships on the one hand and coordinational relationships on the other**

In differentiated societies there are various life-forms which bind their members together for the greater part of their lives in a way which is independent of their will. The state, for example, does not originate in a hypothetical ‘social contract’, which explains why it can organise the collective life of its citizens independent of their will (for example their tax obligations). Participation in the political process – co-determination and co-responsibility – does not entail opting out of this life-form altogether. Even if people decide to emigrate, they simply enter into a different state, for nowhere on this planet is there a ‘stateless’

16. This term designates forms of interlacement (intertwinement) where the inner nature of the forms of social life concerned are left intact.

society. All those life-forms which embrace the lives of their members partially or fully for the greater part of their life-span could be called *institutional* (cf. Dooyeweerd, 1997-III:187).

Marriage exhibits an institutional nature because it is meant to constitute the spouses' marriage relationship for the duration of their lives. A person is born within a family and a circle of relatives and grows up in it without any choice. Not all social collectivities possess an *institutional* character. Think only of a firm, a university college or a sport club – all examples of social collectivities which rest totally on *voluntary* membership.

Yet it is impossible for any person to let her life be taken up completely in any of the various societal collectivities and communities in which she functions – simply because she also takes part in various other interrelations. Social collectivities such as two families, for example, stand in a(n inter-collective) *coordinational* relationship; and two married couples in a(n inter-communal) *coordinational* relationship. Furthermore, every individual, within a differentiated society, is involved in countless inter-individual coordinational relationships where that person relates informally with fellow humans on an equal footing. Conversely, no one's life is completely involved in coordinational relationships only, because the opposite of these ties is found in the institutional and non-institutional collectivities and communities in which they are involved.

We have now reached the point where the preceding analyses – regarding *elementary basic concepts*, *compound basic concepts* and the correlation between *social collectivities* and *communal relationships* on the one hand and *coordinational relationships* on the other – ought to be made useful in explaining why they are helpful in avoiding the pitfalls present in the opposition of 'individual' and 'society'. In the final section of *Part I* we shall therefore focus on the implications of our approach for a different understanding of 'being an individual' (contra *individualistic* approaches) and for an alternative understanding of the meaning of a *differentiated society* (contra *universalistic* modes of thought). At the end of the follow-up article (*Part II*) we shall explain in more detail what the 'category-mistake' present in the opposition of *individual* and *society* entails.

### **'Socialising' the individual and 'de-totalising' society**

Particularly within the intellectual development of modern thought since the Renaissance we have noted the influence of the newly emerging natural science ideal. It proceeded from the urge to enthrone the human person in its supposed autonomous freedom and it inspired the erection of an instrument with the aid of which all of reality could be reduced to its simplest elements in order to construct in a rational way a new world from these atoms. The 'atoms' of human society turned out to be the (abstract and isolated) *individuals*.

The most important assumption, which is at once also the most fundamental mistake, present in this construction of the science-ideal, is that the 'social' dimension of reality does not inherently belong to the world of 'being an individual'. Particularly the motive of *logical creation* transposed universal ontic conditions into the assumed constructive power of the human mind.<sup>17</sup> Thus the *ontic universality* also of the social aspect was eliminated – and eventually, after the rise of *historicism* and the *linguistic turn*, the theme of the *social*

construction of reality surfaced.

Yet, acknowledging the ontic status of the dimension of modal aspects entails the decisive perspective that it belongs to the very constitution of being human that it is *co-conditioned* by the unique meaning of each modal aspect. We have also emphasised the fact that *being an individual* is co-constituted and co-determined by the social aspect of reality. Yet the idea of an *individual* inevitably also at once exceeds the confines of any modal aspect – including the *social aspect*. In a sense this perspective is the complement of the insight that every human person necessarily *functions* within each modal aspect (as articulated more extensively above), because this ‘exceeding’ or ‘transcending’ entails that being human is never *exhausted* by functioning within any modal aspect.

As an alternative to the atomistic or individualistic idea of an (a-social)<sup>18</sup> isolated individual our view is that *functioning* within the social aspect (albeit in a norm-conformative or antinormative way) *inherently* belongs to being human in the sense that no single human being *lacks* a social function, not even when such a person is *alone*. In addition we have shown that the modal structure of the social aspect has its foundation, amongst others, in the numerical and spatial aspects of reality. For that reason the function human beings have in the social aspect is at once connected both with *social unity and multiplicity* and with *social wholeness or social totalities*. But instead of artificially separating these two analogical structural moments and elevating this separation into the two mutually exclusive *isms* of atomism and holism, they ought to be understood in their *uniqueness* and *mutual coherence*.

Yet it is only when the compound basic concepts of sociology as a discipline are accounted for that one is able to provide a foundation for the distinction of different *ways* of social interaction – classified by us in terms of the distinction between collective, communal and coordinational relationships. Adding these distinctions *deepened* our definition of *individualism* and *universalism*, for in terms of them the former reifies coordinational relationships and the latter collective and communal relationships.

Now that we have ‘socialised’ the individual – in the sense of acknowledging its inherent and constitutive function within the *social aspect of reality* (alongside all the other

17. In our first article we noted that modern nominalism accepts universality merely within the human mind. In his *Principles of Philosophy* Descartes said that ‘number and all universals are only modes of thought’ (Part I, LVIII) (see Strauss, 2002: 100, note 3).

18. Note the difference between *a-social* = *non-social* and what is considered to be socially antinormative. Within the jural aspect, for example, we have the contrary of *legal* and *illegal* and within the logical-analytical aspect that of *logical* and *illogical*. Unfortunately there is not an English equivalent for the two mentioned ‘il-’ forms in the context of the social aspect. Although the contrary *polite* – *impolite* does reflect the normative meaning of the social aspect, a more general characterisation is needed. The word ‘unsociable’ is too close to ‘a-social’ and there is not a word like ‘un-social’ (similar to *illogical* or *illegal*) in the English language. But contemplate for a moment the equivalent of the contrary *economic* – *un-economic* in the form of *social* – *un-social* in order to understand the difference between ‘a-social’ and ‘un-social’. Just as little as *illogical* concepts (such as that of a ‘square circle’ – see Kant 1783:341; § 52b) and arguments cease to be instances of *thinking*, antinormative social actions cease to function *within* the social aspect of reality. To be *impolite* is a form of social action, whereas to buy something or to love someone are clearly *non-social* activities.

aspects in which a person concretely functions) – we still have to address the basic and irredeemable flaw present in the overestimation of the spatial whole-parts relation (or analogies of it within post-spatial aspects), for this distortion has consistently resulted in elevating some or other societal collectivity (or even ‘society’ itself) to become the all-encompassing *whole* or *totality* of society. The universalistic legacy, from Aristotle onwards did accept an ‘in-built’ social nature of ‘being human’ – just recall the ‘political animal’ of Aristotle. But this mode of thought invariably results in a ‘totalising’ view of human society – a perspective in terms of which the *state*, or the *church*, or the *nation* (in the ethnic sense of a cultural community – Nazism) is seen as the *societal totality* such that every other societal entity is denatured into becoming a mere part of the privileged whole (see Strauss, 2002:102-113 for a more detailed analysis of the role of the whole-parts relation in the thought of some prominent sociologists).

What Münch has called the ‘own inner laws’ of integrated spheres of life should indeed be appreciated as a key to transcending the shortcomings present in the distortion of all universalistic views of human society. This idea indeed questions the assumption of an all-embracing and all-encompassing totality within human society. The key question concerns the *limitations* of the idea of a whole and its parts.

Suppose we first consider the chemical compound known as table salt ( $NaCl$ ) and then investigate the claim that *Natrium* and *Chlorine* are ‘parts’ of salt. Furthermore, suppose that we divide table salt up to the point where a single  $NaCl$  molecule is found. If we now proceed with a further division it terminates the presence of  $NaCl$  because after such a division only an *Na* atom and a *Cl* atom will be left – and neither *Na* nor *Cl* displays a  $NaCl$  structure. Consequently, *Na* and *Cl* are not *parts* of table salt. In spite of being connected in the chemical compound  $NaCl$  they retain, even within this chemical bonding, something of their ‘own inner laws’ – to use Münch’s phrase.

Traditional universalistic views of human society also expanded the meaningful use of the whole-parts relation beyond its limits. In the first paragraph of this article, in which we have broadened the context, we have noted that both the ancient Greek idea of the *polis* (the state) and the medieval Roman Catholic idea of the *perfect society* (the church) in principle subsumed all other societal ties to the respective elevated ones. This universalistic trait continued via Rousseau and post-Kantian freedom idealism (Schelling, Fichte and Hegel) into the 20<sup>th</sup> century – found in Nazism and Fascism but also particularly evinced in the idea of a *social system* with its *subsystems*.

The ever recurring difficulty with such a universalistic view is that at least in its ‘being-a-part’ every part derives its structural sameness (in the sense of equally *being-a-part*) from the *whole*.

However, the first modern thinker to question this assumption was Johannes Althusius. In 1603 he pointed out for the first time that societal collectivities – such as churches and families – are not *parts* of the *state*. Every one of these non-political (non-state) forms of social life is ruled according to its *own laws* which are fitting to its peculiar nature. Althusius declares:

It can be said that individual citizens, families, and collegia are not members of a realm (i.e. the *state* – DFMS), .... On the other hand, cities, urban

communities, and provinces are members of a realm (Althusius, 1603:16).<sup>19</sup>

With respect to social forms of life distinct from the state, Althusius holds:

Proper laws (*leges propriae*) are those enactments by which particular associations are ruled. They differ in each species of association according as the nature of each requires (Althusius as translated in Carney, 1965:16).

Although Althusius formulated his ideas within the context of his 'symbiotic' view of society reflecting the after-effect of a universalistic-organicistic mode of thought, his insights indeed form one of the most important starting points for an understanding of human society effectively transcending the dilemma of *individualism* and *universalism*.

The Dutch statesman from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Groen van Prinsterer, applied this idea to distinct societal entities by coining the phrase 'sphere-sovereignty'. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was in particular the Dutch legal scholar (and philosopher) Herman Dooyeweerd who elaborated the scope of this fundamental principle of sphere-sovereignty to all dimensions of reality – both to the dimension of modal aspects and to the dimension of (natural and social) entities (see Dooyeweerd, 1997-I-III).

The sphere-sovereignty of every aspect is crucial for a theoretical account of the *limited nature* of every societal collectivity or community. The distinction between collective, communal and co-ordinational forms of social interaction does not transcend the boundaries of the social aspect – it remains within the domain of a compound basic concept – employing all the constitutive analogical structural moments within the social aspect *at once*. Suppose we identify collective social forms of life, such as the state, the nuclear family, faith denominations (like churches, synagogues, etc.), firms, social clubs, universities and schools, and so on, then we have merely identified them as belonging to the category of societal *collectivities*, displaying at once a solidary unitary character and a durable relation of super- and subordination. But we have not yet succeeded in specifying criteria to distinguish them mutually. In order to achieve this the (mentioned) idea of a *foundational* and *qualifying* function is required. Although an extensive analysis of this idea by far exceeds the present context, a succinct explanation will convey the significance of this key idea for an alternative to sociological universalism. Every distinct kind or type of societal collectivity has its *own inner laws*, displays its *own normative structural principle*. What is *distinct* in different *types* of societal collectivities is dependent upon their respective qualifying functions – and since the latter are unique – in the sense of displaying their own sphere-sovereignty – the different social forms of life *qualified* by them are also sovereign within their own spheres of operation.

The state, for example, is qualified by the *jural* aspect that stamps it to be a public legal institution called to balance and harmonise the multiplicity of legal interests on its territory within one public legal order. Whenever an infringement of rights occurs, the demands of public justice call for a restoration, a *retribution*, of what has been (illegally or unlawfully) taken away from someone. Being guided by the jural aspect and the principles of public justice entailed in this qualification, the state is not supposed at once and at the same time

19. Unfortunately Woldring does not highlight this difference in principle between the whole-parts relation and the 'own laws' peculiar to the various non-political realms of life (cf. Woldring 1998:125 ff.).

to act as a cultic-religious institution (as if it is a large faith community), as an economic enterprise (as if it is a macro-firm), and so on. Called to achieve a universal integration of legal interests, the state is not supposed to degenerate into a universalistic totality embracing all of human society at once. Likewise, a church is qualified as a (Christian) faith collectivity<sup>20</sup> and therefore neither called to act as if it is at once a state, school or a business enterprise.

No social collectivity embraces all of human society or all of human life. For that reason the human person can assume multiple roles by functioning within every sphere-sovereign societal collectivity and community without ever being absorbed or exhausted by any one of them.

Consequently, our stance against all universalistic (holistic) views of human society finds its foundation both in the idea that the human person is *more* than any aspect in which one can function and the idea that none of the differentiated multiplicity of collective and communal societal functions of a human person can ever fully absorb or embrace the existence of those human beings merely functioning within these collectivities and communities.

A misunderstanding of this insight easily results in a mistaken view of the differentiated nature of diverse *social identities*. In South Africa some people would claim that they are *first* South Africans and only in the *second place* Afrikaners, Sothos, and so on, while their opponents will make the opposite claim by asserting their ethnic identity to be primary, thus placing the state-identity in the second place. Both positions are wrong, because every human being at once has a function within a differentiated multiplicity of societal forms of life. Surely no one act in all these different capacities at the same time, but one can look at any person through the 'glasses' of any social tie within  eliminating any other social identity.

The aim of the next (and *last*) article (*Part II*) will be to close our discussion of the opposition of individual and society by highlighting the category-mistake entailed in it. It will be done against the background of an analysis of crucial ideas of Sztompka, Habermas and Giddens.

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20. A synagogue is a non-Christian faith community.

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