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Author(s): Joseph H. Fichter, S. J.

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## **The Development of the Individual Within the Social System**

JOSEPH H. FICHTER, S.J.

A. The problem of this paper is the socialization process of the human being. It may be put in these terms: how does the individual become "society-broken?" What are the factors or determinants which enter into that process; what are the elements or discernible components which must be taken into consideration during the process?

In order to avoid confusion we must point out (a) that this is not an analysis of the methods or technics which are employed to measure a person's social development, his degree or intensity of social awareness and solidarity and so forth; nor are we attempting to measure and quantify the social and psychological factors which are necessarily involved in his development.

Furthermore (b) we cannot here investigate the question why the human individual still remains a unique personality even after he has become fairly well-developed along sociocultural lines. So many considerations enter this problem that they cannot be discussed here: the specific fact that an individual is a third child, that his older siblings are girls, that he has four uncles and no aunts, that his parents were twenty-four years old at the time of his birth, that his mother is a Radcliffe graduate and his father an immigrant, and so forth. These are undoubtedly important factors in the social development of this or that particular individual, but because they are unique factors they cannot be generalized in accord with the purpose of this paper.

Roughly speaking, we may say that we are not here interested to find out why this particular Turk, Alorese or Thibetan is different from all other Turks, Alorese or Thibetans. We are more concerned in knowing why he conforms to, and can be placed within, the category of Turk, Alorese or Thibetan. Then we step to another level of abstraction to find a sufficiently non-specific socialization process that cross-cuts all sociocultural systems.

Thus we are seeking an orderly conceptual scheme of all the component elements and factors of socialization of sufficient generalization that they can be said to exist universally, that is, in all sociocultural

systems at whatever degree of civilization they may have arrived. It is clear that all human beings everywhere do not develop into exactly similar persons. Even within the same social system or culture area there are relatively major differences in their socialized personalities. Furthermore, even in the members of the same family, who appear to submit the same potentialities to the same influences, there are still remarkable divergences of development. These differences have been studied elsewhere and often, as in the studies of identical twins, of criminals from the same family, of aberrant personalities with "normal" intellectual and moral training, and other similar cases.

Must we account for these differences? It is obvious that they cannot be accounted for merely through one of the generalized factors discussed in this paper. Here again the evidence has been so overwhelming that only a careless or opinionated observer would place the preponderant causal emphasis on influences like the environment, or heredity, or the Freudian drive, or the Marxian factor. Scholars now seem to be returning to the many-sided but unified approach which has never been abandoned in certain scientific quarters but which has been undeservedly scorned by the "specialists" of the past half-century.

Whether or not we can, in the course of this short paper, make more than passing mention of the sources of individual differences, we must realize that the point of greatest importance here is the question of the basic universal potentialities of socialized persons. If we can establish these with some dependability in our conceptual scheme, and then find the corresponding basic universal factors in the sociocultural system, we shall have posited a large and ample schema.

Finally, it seems necessary to point out in our current non-metaphysical atmosphere that abstractions are of essential importance in this sort of scheme, but that *we do not concretely separate* the various elements, factors, potentialities when we talk of them separately. In other words, the rudiments of logical science permit and encourage mental precision without in any way destroying the *unicity of the object*. Thus, to use a crude example, when we say that a man's body is active in one situation and passive in another, we do not mean that he has two bodies, or that there is a formal separation between parts of his body. So also, only a ragged caricature can bring in the stereotyped "homunculi" when there is a distinction made among mental and emotional capacities.

B. It appears, therefore, that we must make two minimal definitions, or at least set up two empirically descriptive terms, for the polar concepts of our discussion. It is essential to recognize some sort of preliminary operational concept, first of the *human individual*, and secondly of the *social system*.

(a) We need merely consider the human person as we conceive him from empirical observation to note that he shares in recognizable universal human qualities. The definition or description of these qualities ought to be given in such wise that it is found to be applicable to all human individuals everywhere in the world. Omitting any of the aprioristic assumptions that have considered man a series of alternate impulses or forces, a stream of related but purely environmentally originated activities, a conflicting mass of blind instincts (or any one of a dozen other equally unrealistic presuppositions), we may point simply to the few definite minimum characteristics of human nature.

It is a clear and easily verifiable observation that every human person is, either actually or potentially, a rationalizing animal. Whether a new-born infant or a decrepit old man, he has the capacity of rationalizing (whether it is inhibited or seldom used does not matter) which distinguishes the human animal from the brute animal. From the very beginning he has an individuality which distinguishes him from his environment, the social system and all other human beings. (*Cf.* above, page one, third paragraph)

The human individual is born with certain human potentialities which may be roughly termed his undeveloped and untrained mental and nervous systems. With these as his own innate equipment he gradually learns to react to the people and objects outside of himself, to think and talk, to form habits of an individual and social nature. These potentialities are in every person, although in some pathological people they may remain dormant and in others may be unevenly developed. Nevertheless if we prescind from these abnormalities and confine ourselves to a sufficiently generalized and abstract concept we shall find evidence of these potentialities in all human beings, regardless of varying degrees of culture, regardless of differences in heredity and environment, in personal and social development.

(b) In the second place it is necessary also to provide some preliminary definition or description of a generalized sociocultural system, sufficiently broad for application wherever there are people in the world. This means that there are certain observable elements, categories of thought and behavior, that are distinctively and unmistakably sociocultural in character wherever people live together. What then does the most simple, agricultural, perhaps illiterate, community of persons share in common with the most complex, highly industrialized, urbanized social system of the western world?

The point of primary importance here is to note those recognizable determinants or factors which can be said to influence all the members of the group, which are maintained in group life, and which cross-cut

all social systems. Let us say, briefly, that a social system may be described as any aggregate of people living together in the normal pursuits of social ends. This means that every person is a component of a kinship group, at least for some period of his life, that he has various relations of an economic, political and religious nature with the other members of the system or group. Thus a social system may be studied in a number of different aspects; but whether it is characterized by emphasis (1) on the individual participants, (2) on the relations of interaction among them, (3) or on the general patterns of activities that are considered distinctly social, the fact remains that it is empirically recognizable as a social system.

For the purpose of this paper the differences among the various social systems are not so important as their similarities. Even the manner in which any given social system operates, or the degree to which it is socially effective is not of primary importance. The crux of the matter is the complementary relation between the personal and the social, the verification of the correspondence between certain elements in the social system and certain elements in the individual person. In order to do this we must analyze each group of elements in more detail.

C. If we return now to the individual human beings who are in the process of socialization we are in a position to study those personal potentialities which are essential to the process. In observing the gradual growth of a human child we note that he seems to exhibit several propensities which allow degrees of development. Thus we see that the child indicates to us not only certain discernible needs and wants but also the internal capacity (aptitude, ability, faculty) to cooperate in the satisfaction of those needs.

Hence, these capacities or propensities can be best understood if we first ascertain in broad generalizations those categories of needs which are exhibited by all human beings, and to which these capacities correspond. Any attempt to draw clearcut, concrete lines of demarcation among these needs is simply a burlesque of the abstractive process; and to pretend that one category is completely autonomous from the others is a violent misinterpretation of the evidence. However, it appears that human needs may be roughly compartmentalized under the following heads: (a) physical, (b) psychological, (c) sociological, (d) normative. It is evident also that the satisfaction of these needs depends not only on the personal capacities of the individual, but is also in relatively large proportion a function of the social system.

(a) Let us consider each need separately. No one can doubt that *physical* needs, even if considered only on the purely material and sensate, level, are part of the life experience of every normal human being.

It seems that some are experienced automatically and immediately in the new-born infant, while others (e.g., sex) seem to be felt only after the physical organization has developed to some extent.

In either case, however, there is the actualization of a corresponding physical potentiality or capacity in the human individual. The need for food and drink, for tactile and other sensory assuagement, is met by a complementary physical capacity for the individual's satisfaction. If this ability is not present, or if it cannot be remedied in case of injury, the person is said to be incapacitated and will not survive as a well-developed and socialized individual.

(b) The next category of needs, the *psychological*, is perhaps of the greatest significance in this conceptual scheme for these are the most distinctively and essentially human of the individual's needs. They include all of those cognitive and volitional needs or drives which distinguish human beings from all other animals. The gradual development of the child's awareness to these needs has been the subject of careful and fruitful study by many scientists.

The fact that these needs are met with varying degrees of success by the individual's psychological equipment requires no particular demonstration here. It is a commonplace of empirical experience that every human being has the ability to know not only the objects outside himself and his own individuality but also many immaterial and abstract generalizations. In the same way the capacity for free volitional behavior is easily demonstrable to anyone who does not suffer from patterned misconceptions. Whether these, as well as the physical capacities mentioned above, can be satisfied better in society than in isolation, is a question that may be left for later discussion.

(c) Furthermore, there are in every human person certain sociological needs, which apparently can be satisfied only (at least it seems that they can be brought to their perfection only) in the normal processes of group living. These have been the least studied of all human needs, but their presence in the individual cannot be questioned.

The sociological capacities to satisfy this category of human needs appear to be closely allied with the individual's psychological equipment. The ability to react to other people, and to cooperate with them in social action, certainly presupposes the ability to know the persons with whom one associates and to exhibit complementary activities that may be volitional and affective (and frequently also physical.) At any rate this property of sociality which has sometimes been called the "herd instinct" clearly corresponds to definite human needs and may be best exemplified in the so-called social virtues.

(d) Finally, the last category of needs may be studied from various aspects but again its presence in the individual can hardly be doubted. These needs may be called the *normative* (or in a wide sense, the ethical) needs of human beings. In some form they are clearly recognized by all peoples, both simple and civilized. They may be generalized as the universally recognized need to do what one thinks is right and to avoid what one thinks is evil. Apparently this need is not felt by the individual until there is a parallel experience of some of the psychological and sociological needs.

The corresponding moral capacities or potentialities of the human being do not fall into as neat a generalized category as do those which we have termed physical, psychological and sociological. The moral ability of man seems to be a contradictory tendency toward opposite goals or satisfactions. In what is called the human conscience a person recognizes feelings of guilt and wrongdoing as well as an apparent sanction in wellbeing when he has performed an approved action.

In Christian and Judaic tradition the tendency toward evil has been termed the state of original sin, while the tendency toward moral conformity has been called divine grace. That these capacities for good and evil exist in every normal human being cannot be denied by even the most secular and materialistic scientist. What they are called is simply a matter of terminology; and how they are explained as well as positively developed depends upon the type of theoretical or conceptual spectacles through which one looks at human nature.

D. Let us turn now from these four main categories in the individual to a consideration of their equivalents in the sociocultural system. If the capacities of the developing human being are to be actualized in the several categories, physical, psychological, sociological and normative, it seems that we can discover some determinants or factors outside the individual that act as a "stimulus" or influence or coordinating and cooperating mechanism on these potential capacities.

As has been mentioned above, the sociocultural system may be described and analyzed from several points of view, each of them valid for its own purpose. Thus, in a study of the social system the emphasis may be primarily placed on the people who constitute it, or on the specific social interaction which unites them, or finally upon the *social* patterns of thought and behavior which characterize the system. Neither point of view excludes the others, but the third one seems to be the most usable in our present endeavor to trace the social development of the individual person in the system.

It is obvious, of course, that here again there is no hard and fast separation or exclusion of the other elements of the social structure.

When we speak of social patterns we realize that these are patterns that are employed by people in their interaction with, and while they are living in the same community with, other people. They do not have an existence apart from the members of the group; they are not fed to the child like oatmeal, or placed upon him like a coat. They are nothing more than the accepted institutional ways of thinking and acting which are adhered to because of social approval and social authority (that is, there is a group-conviction concerning them, and there are "power centers" or people who enforce them.)

Hence, we may say in general that when a child is born into the world and as he gradually becomes socialized there are social patterns that meet him at every step of the way and to which he is expected to conform. To make this conceptual scheme relatively complete, at least in outline, we include also the automatic, indeliberate or unconscious patterns although the more important ones are those which the individual recognizes and conforms with consciously. This does not mean that everybody conforms all the time. It is part of the difficult problem of social analysis that there are unpredictable deviations from the social norms. This difficulty is allied to that which we mentioned above concerning the apparently bifurcated moral capacities of human beings.

(a) Let us consider each general category of these social patterns separately. The *physical* patterns which are employed in society are numerous and unmistakable. Not only is there feeding, a function common to all animals, but there are peculiarly socialized ways of feeding in different sociocultural systems. Sleeping, clothing, exercise and all the other activities which actualize the physical capacities of human beings are, of course, basically "natural." But this does not mean that they can be carried on in a vacuum devoid of social influence. As a matter of fact, the individual experiences and learns them always in a certain atmosphere, among definite people, in a determined social system. And because of all these surrounding factors the child learns to exercise these capacities in the way that others do.

(b) Secondly, and on a higher level, there are definitely existing *psychological* patterns already institutionalized among the component members of every social system. The people who are in any way associated with the developing individual usually employ generalized and expected modes of cognitive, volitional and emotional experience which the child himself soon learns to accept and practice. This does not mean that one social system contains logic or emotions which another lacks, but it does mean that the members of one social system may be cognitive and affective in ways quite different from those of another social system. This permits also that some emotions may be emphasized at

the expense of others, some widely indulged and others repressed. Everyone is familiar with the comparison, often mere caricature, which pictures the Latin as a warm-blooded sympathetic person, while the Anglo-Saxon is considered a stoney-hearted profit-maker. While these comparisons are almost always overdrawn the fact remains that the psychological development of the individual person is conditioned by the psychological patterns which exist in society around him.

(c) Thirdly, the so-called *sociological* patterns are concerned mainly with the generalized efforts of cooperation that constitute so large a portion of successful social life. They range all the way from the relatively unimportant informal niceties of etiquette to the serious and significant interactions that occur in economic, political and other formal organizations. Group activity is going on all around the growing individual from the earliest period of his life, and since he is an integral component of the group itself from the very beginning, he almost automatically begins to conform to the social influences around him. Thus the developing child learns to cooperate with people, not only in the sense that he imitates their patterns of social interaction, but also in that he negatively avoids offending them or preventing their activities. The sociological patterns thus learned and practiced are nothing more than the institutionalized ways of thought and behavior which people employ in their congregate life. They are the expected and accepted customs and modes of acting with each other. As generalized and universal patterns they exist basically in all social systems, but their peculiar adaptations in this or that social system are the specific sociological patterns to which the individual here and now learns to conform.

(d) Finally, each sociocultural system contains recognizable normative (or in a wide sense ethical) patterns of thought and behavior. In an analysis of this kind we may abstract only those patterns of a relatively highly ethical character which express the most important values in the society. This does not mean, however, that moral evaluation does not permeate the whole social system. As a matter of fact, it is only by the most careful abstract thinking that we can distinguish a category of moral patterns from the categories of physical, psychological and sociological patterns. These three categories exist and can be discovered only because people recognize that there is a difference between the "right" ways and the "wrong" ways of thinking and acting in each of them. The basic generalizations of good and evil, of correct and incorrect, of what ought to be done and what ought to be avoided, may differ greatly from one social system to another. The developing individual may not be aware of these differences. What is important in his own social development is the impact upon him of the specific moral

values that are prevalent in his own society. As mentioned above he has the moral capacity to conform with, or to reject, the prevailing patterns; but it appears that in a fairly well-integrated social system most of the people conform to the basic moral patterns most of the time.

E. In brief resume of this conceptual scheme up to this point we may say that the four basic, general categories of needs (physical, psychological, sociological, normative) which every normal human being experiences are met and relatively satisfied in him when his potential, internal capacities become actualized by means of the corresponding categories of external institutional patterns. It must never be assumed, however, that these are independent, separate capacities in the individual person, or independent, separate institutions in the social system. Concrete, every-day social life exhibits normal people whose abilities are well integrated with each other, a social system in which the patterns are well integrated with each other, and finally a complemental balance and coordination of the people's abilities and the system's patterns. The person in society lives and acts as one whole individual and thus we may say roughly that all four categories of propensities are generally affected when any one of his specific potentialities is actualized. In a similar way the sociocultural system may be said to be a constantly active and whole system which can be so neatly categorized only through the power of abstraction.

But there is one final problem to consider: by what means can society be assured that its patterns will become the patterns of the individual? This orderly conceptual scheme showing the relation between the individual and the social system must also show that relation in movement. Merely to mention and describe the components on each side of the scheme does not explain the dynamic and practical picture of social life as it really operates. What puts it in motion and keeps it going? We have seen that within a relatively wide range it is possible for a person to deviate from the expected patterns of thought and behavior that surround him. Is there some further factor in either the individual or the social system (or in both) which brings the individual into conformity with the system?

The problem may be clarified in this way. Experience proves that there are varying degrees of conformity to social patterns among different individuals as well as within the same person in different situations and under different conditions. The individual may conform relatively perfectly in most of the physical patterns but refuse to conform to many of those in the sociological category. Clearly evident, however, is the fact that no social system could long exist as an integrated whole unless

most of its members accept and follow the established patterns most of the time.

It appears that the answer to this problem lies in the proper operation of two factors: *ethical conviction* and *social authority*. These may be detected constantly at work in society to bring about the desired socialization of the individual. If sufficiently generalized they may be said to exist universally wherever people live in society although they operate more successfully and with greater vigor in some social systems than in others.

The ethical conviction spoken of here is in the first instance that of the group or community. Wherever we find large numbers of people pursuing a fairly integrated social life we find that they are in relatively close agreement concerning those physical, psychological and moral patterns which exemplify for them standard or normal conduct and ideals. In other words, there exists a moral conviction shared by the group and indicating "how things ought to be done" in this particular society.

Social authority reinforces the ethical group conviction. This refers to the persuasive power of certain individuals, or certain groups of individuals, who may be at the top of the political, legal, economic, or religious structure within the system and who exert social pressure to keep the group more or less in conformity with the institutionalized patterns.

The result of this pressure-process for the individual person may be simply stated thus: "the patterns of the culture become the patterns of the individual." The ethical convictions of the others are gradually assimilated by the growing individual, and by the newcomer to the group, because there are always some who exert social authority or pressure to keep the group in conformity. The developing person gradually comes to share in the ethical convictions of the group and submits to the social authority which is exercised in the group, as his individual capacities are fulfilled, developed, satisfied, taken care of, by a series of patterned activities and ideals which the sociocultural system around him exhibits in other already socialized individual persons who act as his mentors and models. If he thinks and acts as they do, and/or as they tell him to, he may be said to be "socialized" in his own particular sociocultural system.

In the early period of life it is, of course, almost exclusively the authority of others which effects social conformity in the individual person. As he grows older he too begins to develop the same convictions that the group entertains; and as he becomes an adult he too may enforce the accepted social patterns by exerting his own authority on others. The cycle of socialization then is complete.

F. The test of this conceptual scheme is, of course, its verification in the concrete reality of some particular social system. There have been sufficient indications of this "relation to reality" in the above sketch to make unnecessary any elaborate detailed application at this point. Probably any person who has grown up in a well-integrated small rural community in the United States could see clearly in his own experiences the concrete unfolding of these personality and social patterns. The scheme is, after all, nothing more than an abstract generalization of the cultural patterns which are fused in the individual's thought and conduct.

An illustrative case, however, is that of Jacques, a "Cajun" who has spent his whole life in a small community of trappers and fishermen along the bayous about fifty miles from New Orleans. Had he been transported at birth to a small village in Kansas, the same generalized processes would have been so differently concretized and specified as to make the same individual an almost completely different "social" being.

Jacques grew up to know that the only kind of "right" food for humans was a diet mainly of rice, shrimp and oysters; that the "best" kind of transportation was by water, usually in a pirogue; that his language, honesty, religion, recreating, economic practices and social etiquette were far superior to those of the "odd" townspeople to whom his father sold muskrat skins and seafood at the pier by the bridge. Even the priest acted and talked in a "funny" way, as all the Cajuns noticed, when he came for the baptisms and marriages before the Easter Mass and the Christmas Feast day, and when he objected in his sermon that the men drank and gambled too much and that a fellow and a girl shouldn't build a house and start a family before the Catholic marriage ceremony took place. After all, the Cajuns had been following good Catholic traditions and practices and prayers long before the priests began to make these semi-annual trips into the swamps. Cajuns had *always* done things this way.

What is the balance of the four categories of institutionalized patterns in Jacques' life? In these difficult swamplands, where houses are built on pilings and mosquitoes never bite Cajuns, his problem of simple physical existence is given grave emphasis. Almost from the beginning he has been aware that his family's thinking has been centered mainly around the securing of practical necessities of living. Even as a boy his work in this regard has been done most often alone, or with one other person. Hence he experiences no complex development of psychological patterns and problems, nor of sociological patterns that involve intricate political and economic activities. He has staked out his own trap-line paths, and Cajun custom protects them for him. His knowledge of

other people and their ways is limited to perhaps fifteen or twenty other families (very much like his own) scattered along the bayous within a radius of five or six miles.

The fact that Jacques' father is one of the "social authorities" in this local community springs from his knowledge of and respect for the Cajun ways of thinking and acting. He is one of the best trappers there; he keeps his gear, as well as his home and family, in good shape; he knows how people are supposed to conduct their business, bring up their children, build their houses. He is a careful drinker and an expert card-player; a fellow who can be depended upon not only to do the right things in the right way but also to keep the others in line. Jacques is gradually reaching the social stature of his father in the community, and it appears that his own practice of the local Cajun customs and patterns, his concern for the, and his conviction that they are really the right and the best ways, will soon establish his influence widely as a social authority.

*Loyola University, New Orleans 15, La.*