

ORGANIZATION OF THE SOCIAL ATOM

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The number of acquaintances which an individual has at the time of testing has been called by me his "acquaintance volume". A person may remember about many of these individuals only that he has met them or talked with them. Most of them, however, do not matter to him, do not mean anything personal to him. And he doesn't matter to them; he doesn't mean anything to them, at least at the moment. But among these acquaintances there is a small group who mean something personal to him, in some degree and in respect to some criterion; he is attracted to them or he rejects them. There may be in this group, whether he knows it or not, individuals to whom he means something, who are attracted to him or who reject him. If we compare with the physiological cell this acquaintance volume, we may say that the general pattern of acquaintances which are without individual meaning for him is like the cytoplasm, and the meaningful acquaintances like the nucleus of the cell. Often the boundary between the outer mass and the nucleus of acquaintances may not be absolute. There may be some individual about whom it cannot be said with finality whether he is a mere acquaintance or already an emotional partner. But the general demarcation line between the nucleus of emotionally related individuals which I termed the "social atom" and the rest of the acquaintance volume will be very clear.

The point of transition from being a mere acquaintance to becoming an emotional partner in a social atom is theoretically significant. A study of numerous social atoms reveals a definite line of demarcation between the acquaintance volume and the social nucleus proper, the "social threshold". We can say that the moment that I wish a certain acquaintance—an individual whom I have just met or whom I may have known for some time—to become closer to me, to enter into a relationship with me, more or less permanent in respect to some criterion, work, love, or whatever, this person has passed the social threshold of my social atom. The same can be said about individuals who wish to enter into a relationship with me, whether I reciprocate their desire or not. They also have passed the threshold of my social atom. To my social atom evidently would belong all individuals to whom I am bound by an invisible desire which may be little or not at all manifest; also those individuals to whom I am tied in actual overt relationships. Indeed, we here see the social atom itself further subdivided into two parts: the outer part of the nucleus formed by the "wished" relationships and the inner part of the nucleus formed by the actualized ones.

The emotional currents which, so to speak, pervade a social atom are of varying intensity. There are many levels of preference. We made a study of the factors contributing to this uneven distribution of preferences, or better said, the uneven intensity of feeling preferences. For a certain social situation (choosing of house-members), the majority of the subjects made full use of their choices. Some did not have enough with five preferences. But a considerable number did not use the full five choices, and a very few chose but one or none at all.

In our usual procedure the individuals tested expressed five degrees of preference, but they did not suggest how many individuals they liked *equally* well. Therefore a series of tests was subsequently made in which the emphasis was slightly differently placed. The subjects were instructed: "As you choose, weigh carefully whether you would like two or three individuals to live with you equally well. You may like two or three persons 'first choice,' or two or three persons 'second choice'; or all the persons to whom you are attracted may be the same degree of choice; or there may be just one 'first choice' and the rest in other degrees, perhaps each at a different degree of preference." The results showed again several levels of preference but often several individuals at the same level of preference. In regard to work a certain young woman named one person first, a man; three persons second, two women and a man; in regard to living in the same house she named no one, preferring to live alone; in regard to love she named one man first and four men second; in regard to social and cultural contact she named ten persons with whom she liked to associate equally well.

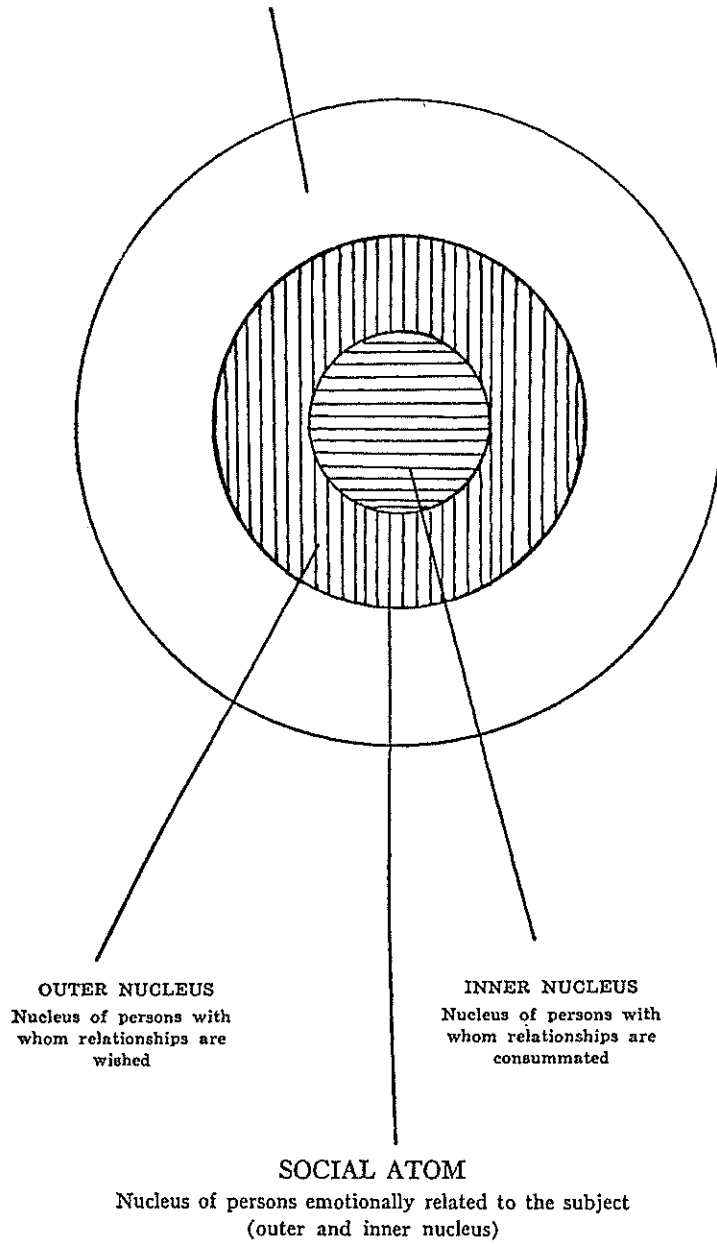
II.

RELATIONS TOWARD THINGS VS. RELATIONS TOWARD PERSONS

Evidently there are individuals whose feelings of preference are more articulate than those of others. Also, some may have more articulate preferences in respect to one criterion, for instance, work. However, it seemed to us that the wide differences of preferential feeling which individuals reveal who are of similar intelligence and under similar environmental influences cannot be explained satisfactorily by simply calling them more or less articulate. There must be other factors of persistent influence.

Now there are besides the preferences for individuals the preferences for things, objects, values, and objectives, like sex, food, money, ideas, etc. A sociometric test was constructed in which the subjects spontaneously reveal in order of preference the things to which they are attracted: for instance, money, sex, clothes, automobiles, books, etc. An analysis of the results and

ACQUAINTANCE VOLUME—Acquaintances which are without emotional meaning for the subject.



their comparison with the type and degrees of preference for individuals which these subjects showed raised the question: What bearing has the greater or lesser affinity toward individuals upon the classification of character? Are there any definite quantitative classifiable relationships between the affinities which an individual has toward persons and the affinities he has toward other things? Does the sense of affinity of an individual for other individuals diminish as his affinity for things and ideas increases, or vice versa?

To illustrate, let us consider one of the subjects who cares for money most of all and exclusively, being indifferent toward all other things and giving as a reason that with money he can buy all that he wants. It can be well seen that in the case of a person who has such an affection for money the persons with whom he would like to work would matter little; that he would not feel any special preference for one or another person so long as these persons equally support his affection for money. He may divide the persons into those who aid him in getting money and those who are of disadvantage to him in this respect.

The sociometric test for interrelations with persons is modified in the manner described so that it becomes a sociometric test for interrelations with things. The two tests will provide for two measures: the affinities of an individual for persons and the affinities of the same individual for things. The correlation of these two types of affinities will gradually develop a measure of *character*. So much for the individual. In regard to the group, and society as a whole, it promises to accomplish a dream, cherished by many but discarded as futile and impractical: the synthesis of the organic concept of society with the economic concept of society, the inclusion of economics into sociometry.

It is probable that there will be found a close relation between the tendency to have a strong affinity for persons and the tendency to have a weak affinity for things; and vice versa, the tendency to have a strong affinity for things and a weak affinity for persons. It is from such studies that we shall be able to estimate the quantitative difference between levels of preference, as for example the difference between a first and a second choice.

An individual may show strong interest in the ideal of love, and urged by it may act with equal kindness toward everyone regardless of his specific individuality. An individual may show a great interest in power over things and people—for instance, for money as conferring the power to buy—and he may act with equal eagerness to gain money for himself regardless of the specific individualities of the people from whom he has to wrest it. An

individual may show a great interest in sensuous pleasures, for instance, sex, and a slight interest in the specific individuals involved. What is, sociometrically speaking, the affinity, the positive or negative "tele"¹ for each of these things as compared with the tele for the persons whom one meets in pursuing life's goals?

We find that individuals who have a slight interest in *specific* individuals in regard to sex are far from being disinterested in personal characteristics; they may have a great interest in certain *group characteristics* in regard to sex. Such individuals develop little attachment to a specific individual, but may be intensely drawn toward individuals possessing certain physical and mental attributes regardless of their individuality. Such a person craves a certain complex of attributes and little, or not at all, the individual carrying them. He uses the individuals; he is not in love with them. He can emancipate, free, separate himself from a specific individual in regard to sex because he was attached to a *combination of attributes* which exist and grow elsewhere also. His sexual impulse is independent of individual persons. Therefore he may be free of attachment to a pattern of individual traits. The more universally distributed these attributes are or these combinations of attributes, the larger will be the number of persons belonging to the group toward which he is drawn. His "freedom" from a specific individual will be relatively greater, the larger the number of individuals who belong to this group.

In the sociometric tests we may find the dominating preference for sex as an impersonal thing suddenly interrupted if a person of group S complex competes with a person of group Non-S. And in general, the feeling-preferences for various things, values, ideas, objects or objectives may at certain points be interrupted, distorted, and complicated by feeling-preferences for individuals. In regard to money, or the equivalents of money, an individual may proceed to accumulate it undisturbed by the individual differences between its owners until he hits upon an individual or individuals to whom he is sensitive (persons whose association he craves because of their social, intellectual, or "racial" superiority, etc.). Then his emotional energy, hitherto directed toward money, may be interfered with and slowed up by personal elements which are wrongly called subjective. This energy may even be transformed and turned in the opposite direction, into the losing of money, the desire to buy with money the association with this person or these persons who have social standing, political influence, sexual appeal, etc. In regard

¹See *Who Shall Survive?* pp. 158-164.

to race as a thing, an individual may find a dominating preference for individuals of a certain race not because of their specific individuality but because of their "race", suddenly interrupted if a person of the group to which he is sensitive competes. This person may not belong to the race required and demanded by him in principle. A monk, subscribing to a certain idea of conduct, may act toward everyone he meets with the same "equalized" affection until this attitude is suddenly interrupted by an individual to whom he is sensitive. It may be useful to differentiate between attraction to individuals for their exclusive individual characteristics—which cannot be "replaced" at least in the thought of the person attracted—and attractions for their group characteristics.

III.

GENERAL SOCIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The imbalances arising can be harmonized, to some extent at least, through constructive rearrangement of people and of things. But this is only a palliative measure. The true solution would be a spontaneous balancing of all these factors. The question is what is the next stage in the evolution of human society, what kind of society will finally crystallize, perhaps aided in finding its destiny by sociometric guides? Theoretically I can visualize three solutions.

The first possibility is a human society in which the preferences for things entirely dominate the preferences for persons; a society in which attachments to persons are extinguished. Attachments exist only to things independent of persons, and to persons only so far as they carry certain things, since the optimum of satisfaction will depend only upon things and things can be indefinitely "replaced" by other things. The individual being may reach a degree of happiness and balance he has never known heretofore. It would be a technological panacea. The emotional currents between persons would be reduced to zero. A certain kind of love would still matter, but not whom one loves; work would matter but not with whom one works; food would matter but not with whom one eats; ideas would matter, too, but not who embodies them. A society would arise in which individuals become symbols and things the only reality. It may bring an optimum of happiness with the extinction of the interrelation strains. The solitaire, the saint, and the schizophrenic are psychological pioneers in this direction. Feeling-for-things would replace feeling-for-persons.

A second outcome would be a human society in which the preferences for individuals would entirely dominate the preferences for things; a society

in which attachments to things in themselves would be extinguished; attachments would exist only to individuals and to things only as they are an expression of individuals, an emotional or personality panacea.

A third resultant would be a human society in which the preferences for individuals and the preferences for things would be extinguished; it would not matter whom you love or what you eat. All attachments are extinguished: the Buddhistic panacea.

EDITORIAL NOTE: This paper was first published in the "Sociometric Review", January 1936, a publication (now out of print) which preceded "SOCIOMETRY, A JOURNAL OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS". The renewed interest in social atom problems made the republication of one of Moreno's early presentations of the subject advisable.

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