

# MAX WEBER'S DEFINITION OF MUTUAL SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

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Submitted: 09/18/2002

## THE CONCEPT OF MUTUAL SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

### (a) *definition*

- Mutual - directed by each toward the other or the others
- Social - involving allies or confederates
- Relationship - the state of being related or interrelated

Putting the three words together, a rough definition of mutual social relationship would be:

- People's state of being related with each other involving allies

A more detailed description of mutual social relationship is:

- Social relationship is the behavior of actors in so far as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of the others and is oriented to the behavior of others. Mere group membership is not sufficient. The relation of the actors may be solitary, or the opposite. A 'state' ceases to exist when there is no longer a probability that certain kinds of meaningfully oriented social action will take place. The subjective meaning need not be the same for all parties to the relationship. The relationship may be temporary or long term. Its subjective meaning may change over time.
- The word "social" denotes that this kind of information is produced in the course of social relationships between several individuals. According to Max Weber, a social relationship is established when there is mutual referencing between two individual actors. Social acting is guided by significant actions of various actors. Social actions are a necessary condition for a social relationship, but not a sufficient one because social acting doesn't require a relationship between the actors: an actor can refer to the actions of another without the latter referring to those of the former. We regard social norms, laws, values, and rules (the latter do not need to be codified, they can also be established in the form of traditions or habits), which are produced during the course of social relationships of several individuals, as social information. These individuals must share a common view of the construction of reality that provides the basis for their social actions and interactions. They are elements of a social system. Social information emerges as a macroscopic structure from the interaction of these individuals within the social system. The interactions are mediated by acts

of communication; individuals act in such a way that they trigger interrelations and actions of other individuals. Individuals co-ordinate their actions in order to produce a social information structure. Social co-operation can be seen as a social relationship in which the mutual references of the involved individuals (these are social interactions) enable all of them to benefit from the situation. By co-operating individuals can reach goals they would not be able to reach alone. New qualities can emerge in an observed social system through social co-operation. The elements/individuals in this system are conscious of these structures, a circumstance that must be attributed to the social whole connecting the individuals rather than to single elements. Such qualities are produced in a collective process by all concerned individuals and are emergent qualities of social systems.

## **BETWEEN THE PARTIES**

### *(a) definition*

There is nothing in particular to define what “between the parties” means, because it is not a proper noun that can be discussed, but rather a straightforward adjective describing that two or more groups are involved in a certain interaction with each other. Because of this difficulty, this section will describe what mutual social relationship is in the context of between the parties.

In the context of between the parties:

- A mutual social relationship is the interaction between two or more parties that share common values, with regulations formed based on these common values governing their actions during the interaction process.

### *(b) example*

- In the business market, there are always at least two parties involved. One is the seller, and the other is the buyer. Both of these parties believe that fair trade should exist because they want to look out for their own self-interest. Because both parties believe that fair trade should exist, the concept of fair trade is a common value that these two parties share. Since this common value is mutually beneficial to both parties, the two parties form a binding *social contract* to agree that both of the parties will practice fair trade during the

interactions with each other.

(c) *development of the theory*

- The idea of a mutual social relationship between the parties is not a theory that was made by scholars based on research. It is rather a general idea that evolved over time as people interacted with each other.

## **SOCIAL CONTRACT**

(a) *definition*

In philosophy / sociology:

- Social contract theory is the view that morality is founded solely on uniform social agreements that serve the best interests of those who make the agreement.

In political science:

- Social contract theory is the belief that political structures and the legitimacy of the state derive from an (explicit or implicit) agreement by individual human beings to surrender (some or all of) their private rights in order to secure the protection and stability of an effective social organization or government.

(b) *example*

- Though we may benefit personally from stealing, we agree not to steal because we also realize that having something stolen would cause us injury (personally). It is therefore in everyone's individual interest and in the interest of societal order to have a "social contract" not to steal. The social contract needs an enforcement mechanism, and therefore we create government, laws and police.

(c) *development of the theory*

- Social contract reasoning was present in Book 2 of Plato's dialog *The Republic*, if not earlier. According to the dialog, we all recognize that it is good for us individually to be unjust, but bad for us individually to suffer. In addition, we recognize that if we do act unjustly, we will suffer injuries from others. To

avoid suffering injury, we make contracts with each other to practice justice and give up injustice.

- Distinct versions of the social contract were proposed by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Rawls.
- Hobbes argued that the original state of nature is a condition of constant war, which rational and self-interested people would be motivated to end. Thus, these people would create fundamental moral laws in order to maintain peace. Hobbes believed that people are motivated only by selfish interests, which guides them to prefer living in a world with moral rules to one without. Without moral rules, people are vulnerable to the selfish interests of others, which puts them at constant risk. Selfishness therefore motivates people to adopt a basic set of rules to live by. Rules, however, are only effective if enforced. Thus, people develop policing and legal systems to maintain order. It is in every person's (selfishly motivated) best interest to live in a world in which people are bound by moral rules duly enforced. Hobbes focus on humans as motivated only by self-interest was criticized.
- Locke argued that the natural state of human existence is a pre-political but moral society where humans are bound by divinely commanded natural law. A social contract is made between citizens who institute a government to prevent people from occasionally violating natural law and to protect one's life and property from attacks by others.
- In contrast to Hobbes, Rousseau argued that humans' natural state is not one of war, but of freedom where creativity flourishes. Since humans are social persons, a social contract is established to regulate social interaction, and this contract establishes an absolute democracy which is ruled by the general will, or what is best for all people. In Rousseau's view, the people agreed to cede authority to some group (government) in order to gain the benefits of community and safety.
- Rawls argued that a group of rational and impartial people will establish a mutually beneficial principle of justice as the foundation for regulating all rights, duties, power and wealth.
- Contemporary social contract theory argues that our basic rights and liberties are founded on mutually beneficial agreements made between members of society.

(d) *criticism of the theory*

- Critics of the social contract theory emphasize that there is no evidence of any state having come into existence through the idealistic means suggested by those such as Locke.
- Critics argue that the state is by nature a corporate body that employs force, threats, and deadly violence to compel individuals to participate in whatever suits the state's interests. People are (sometimes) free to set up the state as their agent, but once set up, the state becomes the principle and the people the agents.

(e) *application to Weber's definition of rights, to the law, and to constitutional law*

- One component of Weber's definition of a right is mutual social relationships, which can only be seen as being based on social contracts. As stated by Rousseau, Rawls, and others, a social contract is established to regulate social interaction, and is a mutually beneficial relationship which is the foundation for regulating rights. Thus the concept of a social contract underlies both mutual social relationships and also forms a basis for the rights we enjoy in society.
- The law is the enforcement and compliance mechanism for social contracts that are established to regulate human interaction within a society. Thus, the law and social contracts are also inextricably linked – without social contracts, the law has no content, without the law, occasional (Locke) or more frequent (Hobbes) violation of social contracts would be the norm.
- The constitution of any country can be seen as a social contract between the citizens of the country themselves, and also between the citizens and the government. The constitution lays out some of the basic rules by which people of a certain society have agreed to live, i.e. a “social contract” among citizens.