Three Social States

1. Just as in physics all substances can be divided into liquid, solid and gas, so the social too can be divided into three states.1

One of these is fluid, hot, passionate and holds a great force of attraction and solidarity. It is, however, quite unstable and tends to transform the other states. Following Max Weber, I call it the *nascent state*. The second state I call the *institutional*, and as a rule we arrive at it step by step beginning from the nascent state. Every one of those steps is an act of choice, of will. The institution emerges from what was intended, restrained, created or glimpsed in the nascent state and it too is animated by a belief and is based on strong solidarity. But it doesn't burn like the nascent state; it is rigid, dogmatic. The third state, what I call the *quotidian*, is a product of the weakening or the decomposition of an institution. It is characterized by low levels of solidarity and utilitarian, pragmatic relationships.

These three states can be found in many social formations, which, when they are in the same state, have similar properties. On the other hand, if the same social formations are in two different states, they show surprising differences. Let us immediately turn to some examples lest we should tire the reader.

We begin with the couple, a dyad formed by two persons. In this case the *nascent state* corresponds with the state of being in love. Before two people who are initially unknown to each other get to know one another, they do not feel any particular sympathies. Then, suddenly, it happens. Falling in love, in this nascent state, they see themselves, their own world, their own past, differently. The nascent state is a rebirth, a new beginning; it releases a great feeling of solidarity. The two individuals are, in a sense, “possessed” by a collective force that animates them and pushes them together.

After some years the same couple comes to exemplify an *institution* (the second state). The two lovers have overcome the difficulties that kept them apart and have chosen to live together. They are, for example, spouses who have children. Now they are a united couple but they no longer have much ardour or enthusiasm for each other. They actually feel nostalgic at times. But at the same time they no longer have the doubts they had during their falling in

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1 This theory was proposed and treated systematically in Alberoni, *Movement and Institution*. The particular case for being in love to be considered a nascent state, as well as for love as institution and as quotidian, is made in Alberoni, *Falling in Love*. 
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love, when ecstasy was accompanied by torment. The institution is a product of choice, was desired. In the nascent state everything seemed possible, even if it wasn’t. Everything, it seemed, could be overcome, while many things showed themselves to be unchangeable. It was necessary to choose and to renounce. What one has in an institution is, however, firmly secured.

Now let’s take a tired, married couple who lead a normal life, supported more by comfort than passion, by the mutual comfort of togetherness rather than a profound love. There is no longer the secure possession of values, that certainty that one has made the right choice, the pride that one has won against the odds. Rather than an institution it is a quotidian formation of habit.

The properties of the nascent state, of institutions and the quotidian, are found in social groups. Take a religious group, a political group or cultural circle, for example, and—importantly—observe it during its birth. Observing a religious group during that phase we find people touched by divine revelation, full of an ardent faith and a great spirit of renewal. All Christian groups before and after the Reformation began with the experience of being able to realize a little more deeply, a little more authentically, the true message of the Gospel. There is brotherhood, spontaneous communism and people are full of joy. They look at their past as a period of darkness and error. Now is the time of enthusiasm, the time of divine origins.

The same religious group then becomes a sect. It sets rules and, in one way or another, settles theological disputes. It generally renounces all enthusiastic expectations of times past. It knows that the coming of the Kingdom is a long process. The members of the sect still call each other brothers. But it is no longer a spontaneous communism of origins and the mistakes and excesses of that earlier time too are no longer evident. The sect has set the rules, defined its field of activity, elects its pastors in specific ways. Solidarity is at its most passionate; it trembles yet everyone can rely on it. This is the institution.

In this group we can also observe the third, quotidian state. Now the structure of the sect is merely customary. No longer does anyone enter it by way of conversion. The people born in a certain area go to church because their parents did. The parishes try to eek out a living. The priest takes care more of mundane affairs than the affairs of God. There is no longer a strong solidarity between the members. They still use the word brother but only during church

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A group in the nascent state is similar to what Victor Turner called “communitas” (see Victor Turner, The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure, Transaction Publishers, New Jersey, 1969). For Turner, however, communitas does not denote the beginnings of a movement. It is never the goal, the ideal of an institution. In the terms of his proposed theory, it is rather an institution of a particular type.