

employ the apparently required punctuation marks and yet allow the reader an easy comprehension of what was being said about what? Would the limits of doing things in print have been reached?

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That is what frame analysis is about.

2

Primary Frameworks

1

When the individual in our Western society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation of a kind that can be called primary. I say primary because application of such a framework or perspective is seen by those who apply it as not depending on or harking back to some prior or "original" interpretation; indeed a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful.

Primary frameworks vary in degree of organization. Some are neatly presentable as a system of entities, postulates, and rules; others—indeed, most others—appear to have no apparent articulated shape, providing only a lore of understanding, an approach, a perspective. Whatever the degree of organization, however, each primary framework allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms. He is likely to be unaware of such organized features as the framework has and unable to describe the framework with any completeness if asked, yet these hand-caps are no bar to his easily and fully applying it.

In daily life in our society a tolerably clear distinction is

sensed, if not made, between two broad classes of primary frameworks: natural and social. Natural frameworks identify occurrences seen as undirected, unoriented, unanimated, unguided, "purely physical." Such unguided events are ones understood to be due totally, from start to finish, to "natural" determinants. It is seen that no willful agency causally and intentionally interferences, that no actor continuously guides the outcome. Success or failure in regard to these events is not imaginable; no negative or positive sanctions are involved. Full determinism and determinateness prevail. There is some understanding that events perceived in one such schema can be reductively translated into ones perceived in a more "fundamental" framework and that some premises, such as the notion of the conservation of energy or that of a single, irreversible time, will be shared by all. Elegant versions of these natural frameworks are found, of course, in the physical and biological sciences.¹ An ordinary example would be the state of the weather as given in a report.

Social frameworks, on the other hand, provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being. Such an agency is anything but implacable; it can be coaxed, flattered, affronted, and threatened. What it does can be described as "guided doings." These doings subject the doer to "standards," to social appraisal of his action based on his honesty, efficiency, economy, safety, elegance, tactfulness, good taste, and so forth. A serial management of consequentiality is sustained, that is, continuous corrective control, becoming most apparent when action is unexpectedly blocked or deflected and special compensatory effort is required. Motive and intent are involved, and their imputation helps select which of the various social frameworks of understanding is to be applied. An example

1. Edward Shils, in a suggestive paper on the sociopolitical aspects of the moral order, "Charisma, Order and Status," *American Sociological Review*, XXX (1965): 199-213, argues:

The fundamental discoveries of modern science in cosmology, astronomy, medicine, neurology, geology, genetics, are significant as disclosures of the basic order of the cosmos. Scientific order, like the order disclosed by theology, has its imperatives. Being in "regular relations" with the truths of science, doing things the "scientific way," having a "scientific attitude" are as much responses to the imperatives of the order disclosed by scientific research as pious godfearingness is a response to the imperatives of the theologically disclosed religious order. [p. 204]

of a guided doing would be the newscast reporting of the weather. So one deals here with deeds, not mere events. (We support some perceivedly basic distinctions within the social sphere, such as that between human and animal purposiveness, but more of this later.) We use the same term, "causality," to refer to the blind effect of nature and the intended effect of man, the first seen as an infinitely extended chain of caused and causing effects and the second something that somehow begins with a mental decision.²

In our society we feel that intelligent agents have the capacity to gear into the ongoing natural world and exploit its determinacy, providing only that natural design is respected. Moreover, it is felt that, with the possible exception of pure fantasy or thought, whatever an agent seeks to do will be continuously conditioned by natural constraints, and that effective doing will require the exploitation, not the neglect, of this condition. Even when two persons play checkers by keeping the board in their heads, they will still have to convey information concerning moves, this exchange requiring physically competent, willful use of the voice in speech or the hand in writing. The assumption is, then, that although natural events occur without intelligent intervention, intelligent doings cannot be accomplished effectively without entrance into the natural order. Thus any segment of a socially guided doing can be partly analyzed within a natural schema.

Guided doings appear, then, to allow for two kinds of understanding. One, more or less common to all doings, pertains to the patent manipulation of the natural world in accordance with the special constraints that natural occurrences impose; the other understanding pertains to the special worlds in which the actor can become involved, which, of course, vary considerably. Thus each play in checkers involves two radically different bases for guidance: one pertains to quite physical matters—to the physical management of the vehicle, not the sign; the other pertains to the very social world of opposing positions that the play

2. Refinements provided by philosophers unintentionally express the murkiness of our ideas here. See, for example, Arthur C. Danto, "What We Can Do," *Journal of Philosophy*, LX (1963): 435-445, and "Basic Actions," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, II (1965): 141-148; and Donald Davidson, "Agency," in Robert Brinkley et al., eds., *Agent, Action and Reason* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), pp. 3-25.

has generated, wherein a move can equally well be made by voice, gesture, or the mails, or by physically shifting a checker by the fist, any combination of fingers, or the right elbow. Behavior at the board can easily be separated into making moves and shifting checkers. And an easy distinction can be drawn between a clumsy move, one that ill considers the strategic positions of the two players, and a move made clumsily, one that has been badly executed according to local social standards for accomplishing physical acts. Observe that although an adult with a newly acquired prosthetic device might play checkers fully mindful of the physical task involved, ordinary players do not. Decisions as to which move to make are problematic and significant; pushing the checker once the decision is made is neither. On the other hand, there are guided doings such as fixing a sink or clearing a sidewalk in which sustained, conscious effort is given to manipulating the physical world, the doing itself taking on the identity of an "instrumental procedure," a task, a "purely utilitarian" activity—a doing the purpose of which cannot be easily separated from the physical means employed to accomplish it.

All social frameworks involve rules, but differently. For example, a checker move is informed by rules of the game, most of which will be applied in any one complete playing through of the game; the physical manipulation of a checker, on the other hand, involves a framework informing small bodily movements, and this framework, if indeed it is possible to speak in terms of *a* or *one* framework, might well be manifest only partially during the playing of a game. So, too, although the rules for checkers and the rules of vehicular traffic can be (and are) well enough explicated within the confines of a small booklet, there is a difference: the game of checkers incorporates an understanding of the governing purpose of the participants, whereas the traffic code does not establish where we are to travel or why we should want to, but merely the restraints we are to observe in getting there.

In sum, then, we tend to perceive events in terms of primary frameworks, and the type of framework we employ provides a way of describing the event to which it is applied. When the sun comes up, a natural event; when the blind is pulled down in order to avoid what has come up, a guided doing. When a coroner asks the cause of death, he wants an answer phrased in the natural schema of physiology; when he asks the manner of death, he

wants a dramatically social answer, one that describes what is quite possibly part of an intent.³

The idea of a primary framework is, then, the first concept that is needed: I wish it were more satisfactory. For example, there is the embarrassing fact that during any one moment of activity, an individual is likely to apply several frameworks. ("We waited till the rain stopped and then started the game again.") Of course, sometimes a particular framework is chiefly relevant and provides a first answer to the question "What is it that's going on here?" The answer: an event or deed described within some primary framework. Then one can begin to worry about the microanalytic issues of what is meant by "we," "it," and "here" and how the implied consensus is accomplished.

Now a further consideration is necessary. When an *x* and *y* axis can be located as the framework within which to identify a given point, or a checkerboard is brought to mind as a matrix within which to locate a move, the notion of a primary framework is clear enough, although even here there is the issue of the dependency of a particular framework upon our understanding of frameworks of that type. When one looks at some ordinary happening in daily life, say, a passing greeting or a customer's request for the price of an article, an identification of the primary

3. Marshall Houts, *Where Death Delights* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1967), pp. 135-136. Guy E. Swanson, "On Explanations of Social Interaction," *Sociometry*, XXVIII (1965), presents the same argument and then warns that this observation itself does not carry us far enough:

We understand or explain an empirical event by showing that it is an instance, an aspect, a phase, a consequence, or a cause of other events. Conceptualization is the symbolic formulation of such relationships. In translation, one provides more than one conceptualization for a given event. Thus a wave of the hand might be conceptualized in physical terms as a discharge of energy, in biological terms as a neuro-muscular process, in psychological terms as a symptom of anxiety, and in social terms as a gesture of greeting.

The special danger for our purposes is that translation, the multiple conceptualization of an event, is made a substitute for an identification of the steps by which events of one order, that is, behavioral interaction, become events of another order, that is, social interaction. To show that a wave of the hand may fruitfully be considered both as a symptom of anxiety and a greeting tells us nothing of how it came to be either or how it might become merely one and not the other. Translation is a matter of multiple classification. What we require are interrelated implications. [p. 110]

framework is, as already suggested, very considerably more problematic. Here indeed is where the writers in the tradition I am employing have quietly fallen down. To speak here of "everyday life" or, as Schutz does, of the "world of wide-awake practical realities" is merely to take a shot in the dark. As suggested, a multitude of frameworks may be involved or none at all. To proceed, however, an operating fiction might be accepted, at least temporarily, namely, that acts of daily living are understandable because of some primary framework (or frameworks) that informs them and that getting at this schema will not be a trivial task or, hopefully, an impossible one.

In describing primary frameworks so far I have limited attention to those that are assumed (explicitly or in effect) by the individual in deciding what it is that is going on, given, of course, his particular interests. The individual, it is true, can be "wrong" in his interpretations, that is, misguided, out of touch, inappropriate, and so forth. "Wrong" interpretations will be considered throughout. Here I want only to mention the belief that in many cases the individual in our society is effective in his use of particular frameworks. The elements and processes he assumes in his reading of the activity often are ones that the activity itself manifests—and why not, since social life itself is often organized as something that individuals will be able to understand and deal with. A correspondence or isomorphism is thus claimed between perception and the organization of what is perceived, in spite of the fact that there are likely to be many valid principles of organization that could but don't inform perception. And just as others in our society find this an effective claim, so do I.⁴

4. Some students would have it, of course, that the belief I express here is unnecessary and misplaced and that one ought to restrict oneself totally to analyzing a subject's conceptions without drawing on the issue of their validity, except when this issue is itself treated as merely another matter to examine ethnographically. Else one confound subject matter with the means of studying it. Such a position introduces a famous problem of its own, the requirement that readers exempt the writer's generalizations should be included in this requirement, since they often succeed in illuminating matters through this indulgence.) More important, it can be argued that although all interpretive responses ought to be treated as a subject matter, some happen to provide useful beginnings of, not merely for, analysis.

II

Taken all together, the primary frameworks of a particular social group constitute a central element of its culture, especially insofar as understandings emerge concerning principal classes of schemata, the relations of these classes to one another, and the sum total of forces and agents that these interpretive designs acknowledge to be loose in the world. One must try to form an image of a group's framework of frameworks—its belief system, its "cosmology"—even though this is a domain that close students of contemporary social life have usually been happy to give over to others. And note that across a territory like the United States there is an incomplete sharing of these cognitive resources. Persons otherwise quite similar in their beliefs may yet differ in regard to a few assumptions, such as the existence of second sight, divine intervention, and the like.⁵ (Belief in God and in the

5. According to an AP report (*San Francisco Chronicle*, March 4, 1968), Marine Colonel David E. Lownds authorized Lance Corporal D. E. Legris to use brass divining rods to search for suspected North Vietnamese buried tunnels in Khe Sanh:

"No matter how stupid anything is, and I don't say the brass rods are stupid, we use it," said the base commander. . . . Wells [commander of the sector where an underground tunnel was found] men—from C Company, First Battalion of the 26th Regiment—are using divining rods. Over a tunnel the rods are supposed to either cross or spread apart, depending on the individual.

The military is not alone in manifesting this sort of open-mindedness. As a last resort, the then assistant attorney general of Massachusetts, John S. Botomly, apparently authorized use of the Dutch seer Peter Hurkos in an effort to identify the Boston Strangler. See Gerold Frank, *The Boston Strangler* (New York: New American Library, 1966), pp. 87-120. The widely publicized (and televised) efforts of the late Bishop James A. Pike to reach his son who had departed to the other side is another case in point. (See, for example, *Time*, October 6, 1967; Hans Holzer, *The Psychic World of Bishop Pike* [New York: Crown Publishers, 1970]; and James A. Pike [with Diane Kennedy], *The Other Side* [New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969]. An historical treatment of late Victorian spiritualism in England is provided by Ronald Pearsall, *The Table-Rappers* [London: Michael Joseph, Ltd., 1972].) I might add that often those who hold these occult beliefs feel they are supporting a scientific view, merely one that has not yet been accepted by the authorities in charge of our sciences. Here see Marcello Truzzi, "Towards a Sociology of the Occult: Notes on Modern Witchcraft" (unpublished paper, 1971).