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come to know. I do not think of institutionaliza-
tion as the primary source of structural innovation
in systems of social interaction, whether micro-
scopic or macroscopic. I do, however, think of
it increasingly as a process by which the conse-
quences of innovative initiatives, many of which
fit into the voluntaristic context, are subjected to
selective influences at a variety of different levels.
Indeed, I have come recently to feel, and to work
actively in the analysis of the problem, that there
is a close theoretical analogy in the non-pejorative
sense, between the process of institutionalization
and that of natural selection, as that concept has
been central to the theory of organic evolutionary
process ever since Darwin. I merely mention
this context, however, because it is far too com-
plex to enter into in any substantial way in this
brief commentary.

In conclusion, let me reiterate that by and
large I think Turner's is a very fair statement of
the relation of my own position to that of the
group called social interactionists. I think he is
quite right that the primary differences do not
concern the main theoretical structure but rather
research strategy and levels of more empirical
interest. He is quite right to emphasize my
concern with problems of system imperatives
which however he is also right to say has been
exaggerated as an unacceptable determinism, by
criticism from the social interactionists side. I
think Turner has made an important contribution
to theoretical clarification.

ACTION AND INTERACTION THEORY: SOME QUESTIONS OF THEORY BUILDING STRATEGY—A REPLY

by Jonathan H. TURNER

In my paper, "Parsons is a Symbolic Inter-
actionist," I sought to reduce some of the acrimony
surrounding Blumer's and other interactionist's
excessive criticisms of Parsons' action theoretic
framework. In reviewing Blumer's comments,
it is clear that I failed in reducing acrimony,
but in another respect, the article has been suc-
cessful: Blumer has presented his case in a most
clear and forthright manner, while Parsons has
clarified a number of issues for me and hopefully
for others.

At the heart of the "debate" between the inter-
actionist and action perspectives are the dual ques-
tions: What is the nature of the social world?
And what type of science is possible in studying
this world? My comments here will address some
of the specific questions raised by Blumer, but
rather than engage in a point by point debate,
I prefer to address Blumer by seeking to answer
these dual questions.

What is the Nature of the Social World?

In an earlier work (1974: 297-320), I raised this
most fundamental question and found the dom-
inant theoretical paradigms in sociology unable to
provide a very detailed answer. This may seem
like an extraordinary statement in light of Blu-
mer's eloquent advocacy of the position that "so-
ciety is symbolic interaction" or Parsons' well
developed theoretical system of concepts describ-
ing voluntaristic action in various "action sys-
tems." Yet, I remain unconvinced that social
theory has proceeded very far beyond simple
cries that society is symbolic interaction and
social action is both voluntaristic and structured.
As I see it, the basic theoretical problem for
social theory is to understand why and how
patterns of social organization of differing size,
scope, and duration are created, maintained,
changed, and broken down. Phrased differently,
this is the old Hobbesian "problem of order," but
I prefer to label it the "problem of institutional-
ization and de-institutionalization."

To resolve this fundamental puzzle, I believe
that it is necessary to develop concepts capable of
answering five general questions (Turner, 1974):
(1) What are the capacities of individual humans?
(2) How do these affect the nature of social rela-
tions among individual humans? (3) What pat-
terns of social structure or collective organization
emerge from the stabilization of such relations?
(4) Do these emergent social structures reveal
social relations? (5) And what patterns of social
structure emerge from these social relations
among collective units? Naturally, in developing
concepts capable of answering these general ques-
tions, answers about the relative permanence and
stability of social relations and emergent social
structures will be possible.

Key concepts in the action and interaction
theoretic frameworks implicitly address this issue.
For example, concepts like "social system," "sub-
system," "action system," "institutions," and
"joint action" point to the fact that stabilized
patterns of interaction—that is, emergent social
structures—arise out of basic social processes, such
as voluntarism and symbolic interaction; but as I
will argue, neither perspective provides a very
detailed answer to the five questions beyond
assertions that indeed interactive processes create
and are affected by emergent social structures.

(1) *What are the capacities of individual
humans?* Both action and interaction theory pre-
sent well developed concepts for describing the
basic capacities of humans. Blumer is quite
wrong in his assertion that Parsons' use of Freu-
dian concepts does not and cannot describe
human capacities. While I find Mead's concept
of "role taking" more lucid than Parsons' use of
Freud's "identification" and related concepts, and
while I personally prefer the concept of "self"

to "ego," both theorists point to the capacity of actors to read each other's gestures, to symbolically insert objects into situations, and to see themselves as objects in any interaction setting. Mead's discussion of "mind" and "self" is, contrary to Blumer's protest, parallel to Freud's discussion of ego processes. With respect to what mobilizes humans to interact with each other, both Freud and Mead posit motivation to arise out of states of disequilibrium between organism and its environment. To his detriment, Mead had little to say about *generic classes and types* of disequilibrium, but Blumer is incorrect in his assertion that Freud's and Mead's schemes are all that different. In following Freud, as well as early interactionists, Parsons certainly does not underemphasize the self-interaction processes and the construction of social acts by humans in states of disequilibrium, for indeed this was he phenomenon of most interest to Freud. Freud saw humans as rather "creative" in their efforts to, in Blumer's words, "define," "curb," "sustain," "abet," "abolish," and "transform" motivations. Thus, action and interaction theory posit very similar concepts to describe human capacities: (a) Humans are motivated by states of disequilibrium; (b) humans are interpretive organisms; (c) humans define situations symbolically; (d) humans insert objects symbolically, including themselves as objects, into situations; and (e) humans assess, evaluate and select alternative lines of action with respect to the objects of situations. It is to the refinement of concepts describing these basic processes, then, that action and interaction theorists should begin to devote their efforts.

(2) *How do social relations reflect these capacities?* For action theory, humans use their basic capacities to mutually orient themselves to each other and then to adjust lines of conduct as required by the various objects, including self, perceived to exist in the situation. Mead's concept of "role taking" provides a clearer picture of how "mutual orientation" occurs than does action theoretic concepts, but otherwise, both action and interaction theory view the process of forming social relationships as one of reconciling dispositions to act toward "objects" in a situation. The big theoretical questions for action and interaction theory must now revolve around specifying *generic types* of role taking in different *types* of situations and how these affect the *types* of orientations to, or definitions of, situations; and in turn, how all of these processes affect the nature of social relations among individuals.

In this context, Blumer is quite wrong in his evaluation of the pattern variables. Actors define situations both in anticipation and in retrospect; and social science must be capable of developing concepts to describe the generic classes or types of orientation, whether before, during, or after action. Blumer assumes that because the "pattern

variables" may be inadequate to the task, the task itself is misdirected. If action theorists and interactionists cannot do this fundamental task, then social science is not possible.

(3) *What structures emerge from social relations among individuals?* Blumer consistently argues that social organization is "something to be achieved," and Parsons would certainly not disagree. Indeed, diverse types of social structures created and held together by symbolic, as opposed to instinctual, processes are one of the most unique qualities of human organization. But, while Blumer argues that structure does constrain human action, as one of the objects of orientation, its types, forms, and other characteristics do not need to be classified and analyzed. Aside from vague phrases like "joint action" and "group" it is not clear that interactionism has any concepts to describe emergent social structures. Sociology textbooks are full of ad hoc definitions of groups, organizations, communities, and other presumably emergent social structures, but are these more than the fabrications of textbook writers? Blumer might say "yes," but his passion for inductive theorizing has yet to provide an indication about what *generic types* of social structure are "achieved" by interacting individuals. Surprisingly, Parsons' action theory with its imputed "structural bias" has not provided a very complete answer to this same question. Concepts like "system," "subsystem," "social system," as well as insightful substantive analyses of economy, education, polity and the like, would indicate that emergent patterns of social organization arise out of interaction. But, Parsons' scheme has yet to provide concepts capable of distinguishing *generic types* of "social systems"—although his work on evolutionary stages seems promising. Both action and interaction theory should therefore direct more attention to questions of what *types* of social organization, which are distinguishable from each other in terms of fundamental properties, emerge out of different *types* of social relations among individuals.

(4) *Do emergent structures reveal unique types of social relations?* Blumer apparently believes that collective units interact and form more enduring social relations with each other through the same "role taking," definitional, and assessment processes occurring among individuals. Parsons, on the other hand, would argue that new concepts—such as values, generalized media of exchange, and system imperatives—are necessary to understand these more macro types of social relations. Thus, the basic issue is: Are there qualitative differences in social relations among collective units, such as groups, organizations, communities, nation-states, or whatever. And does understanding of these types of units require *additional concepts* incorporated into laws which

make little mention of individu answer to these questions is "y is correct in his search for th laws. The words, *additional con* to this line of argument, since correct in his assertion that in processes are not suddenly st would argue along with Parsor spectives should search for con supplement those used to unders of social organization among in

(5) *Are there emergent structu tive units?* It would seem that forms of macro organization em relations among collective unit forms need to be distinguished t ing their fundamental propertie these structures? What are thei are concepts like "society," " community," and "social institu the task. Again, as the vague like "social system," "joint acti tionalization" suggests, both inte theory have very little to say abc structures. This fact would indi should be directed at developin cepts for describing how *basi* organization emerge out of c social relations among different units of organization.

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make little mention of individuals? I think the answer to these questions is "yes," and Parsons is correct in his search for these concepts and laws. The words, *additional concepts*, are critical to this line of argument, since Blumer is quite correct in his assertion that individual symbolic processes are not suddenly suspended. But I would argue along with Parsons that both perspectives should search for concepts which will supplement those used to understand micro forms of social organization among individuals.

(5) *Are there emergent structures among collective units?* It would seem that there are various forms of macro organization emerging from social relations among collective units and that these forms need to be distinguished by concepts denoting their fundamental properties. But what are these structures? What are their properties? And are concepts like "society," "nation," "societal community," and "social institution" adequate to the task. Again, as the vagueness of concepts like "social system," "joint action," and "institutionalization" suggests, both interaction and action theory have very little to say about these emergent structures. This fact would indicate that attention should be directed at developing additional concepts for describing how *basic types* of macro organization emerge out of different *types* of social relations among different *types* of collective units of organization.

In reviewing what Blumer and Parsons have to say about the nature of the social world, then, it is clear that much of the theoretical work has yet to be done. Parsons appears further along because there is at least the recognition that additional concepts are necessary to describe different types of social relations and emergent structures at different levels of social organization. And yet, his "*general* system of concepts" is just that: too general and inattentive to diverse levels of social organization. For it is one thing to acknowledge the existence of emergent structures and another to develop concepts and propositions describing the operation of processes at these different levels. In contrast, I have always had difficulty determining whether or not Blumer actually acknowledges the existence of different levels and types of social organization, since indeed, I see few concepts and propositions to explain the operation of social processes at other than a micro level of interpersonal interaction. But since Blumer finds it "astonishing" that I should "admit, on the one hand, that 'emergent patterns' arise out of a process of symbolic interaction yet, on the other hand, to endeavor to account for them by turning to something other than the procedures that give rise to them(!)," then it is clear that people of my persuasion will always be accused of "slight-of-hand maneuvers" when providing what I consider to be necessary "additional concepts." And I guess that it is for

this reason that Blumer's package of concepts is so small; all of the needed "additional concepts" are apparently unnecessary to describe and understand patterns of emergent social organization. But the disagreement here is not over the nature of reality, but over what type of science is possible––the second of the two questions posed earlier.

What Type of Science is Possible?

As long as emergent properties are considered to be amenable to understanding *only* by the concepts *giving rise* to macro forms of social organization, then it is not possible to reconcile Blumer's and Parsons' approach to building theory. I do not think, as Blumer does, that it is a question of inductive vs. deductive theorizing that separates Parsons and Blumer, but rather, it is a question of whether or not additional concepts, which do not make reference to individuals, are necessary to study the complex social processes and emergent phenomena arising out of various types of voluntaristic and symbolic processes among individuals and collective units.

Blumer believes that his approach, more than any other, "starts with a problem or question which has been raised with regard to the empirical world and seeks through persistent and flexible examination of that world to progressively clarify the problem and to progressively cut out and refine the empirical data that are relevant to the problem." But in the end, Blumer would insist that, only with respect to the symbolic-interpretive processes of individuals and collective units can "relevant" concepts be developed. This is, of course, *a priori* deductive reasoning which would force us all to approach the study of international relations, corporate competition, group conflict, or some other set of relations among macro units with only *one* conceptional baggage, i.e., that advocated by Blumer.

The empirical world is composed of complex relations among macro units which, under various circumstances, form different types of emergent social structures. The "persistent and flexible examination" of this world probably require concepts which are so far from those that Blumer believes appropriate as to make them appear, from his limited perspective, as *a priori* and *ad hoc* machinations of deductive theorists. I would submit that many of Parsons' concepts, which Blumer finds so abhorrent, are the result of a "persistent and flexible examination of the empirical world"; Blumer's objection is that he does not like them, primarily because he is not willing to admit that certain structures and processes are "out there" in the empirical world. And if he is willing to allow their existence, then his own *a priori*, ad hoc, and restrictive assumptions about how to study the nature of the social world would not allow us to study them adequately.

Blumer's assumptions force us to study social relations among individual humans in micro social structures. And while I have personally gained insight from his advocacy and analyses of social processes, I have come to feel—being a "persistent" and "flexible" investigator myself—that "something additional" is required. And this "something" is a science which will acknowledge emergent properties and the need for an extensive body of concepts, above and beyond interpersonal

dynamics and their rather simple and analogous application to collective units, which can "sensitize" us to the operation of processes at different levels of social organization.

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Turner, J. H. 1974. *The Structure of Sociological Theory.* Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey.

REPLY TO PARSONS' COMMENTS

by Herbert Blumer

The Editor has granted me the courtesy of a brief reply to Professor Parsons' comments on my remarks. In my judgment Parsons has an erroneous understanding of the symbolic interactionist point of view that stems from George Herbert Mead, a misunderstanding traceable in large measure to Parsons' failure to grasp the nature of the "self" as seen by Mead. For Mead, the self is far more than an "internalization of components of social structure and culture." It is more centrally a *social process,* a process of self-interaction in which the human actor indicates to himself matters that confront him in the situations in which he acts, and organizes his action through his interpretation of such matters. The actor engages in this social interaction with himself, according to Mead, by taking the roles of others, addressing himself through these roles, and responding to these approaches. This conception of self-interaction in which the actor is pointing out things to himself lies at the basis of Mead's scheme of social psychology. For Mead, this process of self-interaction constitutes the mental life of the actor, it permeates his overt interaction with others, it is the means whereby he organizes his action, it enables him in problematic situations to transcend the constraints of social and cultural structure and, above all, it is not to be confused with an implanted psychological structure.

Parsons' two critical comments on my remarks show that he has not grasped this basic part of

Mead's thought. Let me be specific. (1) Freud's scheme of mental life is *not* cast in the form of discursive self-interaction in which the individual stands over against himself and approaches himself through the roles or others; instead, it is cast in terms of the interplay of the id, the ego, and the super-ego as three parts of a human psyche. This fundamental difference between Mead and Freud cannot be glossed over by an irrelevant reference to a reflective self." I have not caricatured Freud; Parsons has misunderstood Mead. (2) I am puzzled by Parsons' remarks on my discussion of "pattern variables." He charges that I have committed a "rather gross misinterpretation" of the concept of pattern variables. Yet the "misinterpretation" cannot be mine since I merely took Turner's characterization of the pattern variables as "... the choice *making* processes of actors—a conceptualization which parallels the interactionist's formulation of the definitional-interpretative process." Why should my rejection of the asserted parallel lead to the accusation that I have grossly misinterpreted the concept of pattern variables? Putting aside this instance of puzzling logic, I merely wish to note that Parsons has not at all squared the scheme of pattern variables with the crucial process of self-interaction as seen by Mead—a process in which actors can alter as well as form their objects, their orientations and their choices. The gap here between Mead and Parsons is profound.

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Volume 45, Numbers
Sex and Social
A special issue edite

Volume 45, Number