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Reference

mother's rights. The latter would hardly be less totally violated if she were tortured to death by someone else. To echo Hart, if there are any 'natural rights' at all, the right not to be tortured, or delivered to a prospect of torture, is surely absolute.

Theories of rights (and especially of 'natural' or active rights) often present the individual as everything and society as nothing. As Milne shows, this is an exaggeration, which the broader concept of human rights, incorporating such 'passive' entitlements as those to food, shelter, medical attention and education, to some extent redresses, at least in principle. To claim that there are limits beyond which the individual's freedom and welfare may not be subordinated to what a government sees as the common good is hardly now disputable, though the contrary consideration posed by Mabbott's argument suggests that there should also be limits to the extent to which governments ought to be impeded from the promotion of genuinely common purposes by individuals invoking their rights. Nevertheless, it is difficult to disagree with the contention that, in this century, and particularly since the zenith of laissez-faire in the Great Depression of 1929 onwards, the grimmest outrages against humanity have, on balance, come more from an excess in the power of governments than from a deficiency in it. If that is conceded, the revived emphasis on rights represents a salutary trend.

See also JUSTICE.

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ritual, political *See* POLITICAL RITUAL

role Denoting sequences of behaviour emitted by individuals occupying, or seeking to occupy, a particular position in a social situation, the concept of role has, of course, been borrowed from literature, and in more recent centuries, from drama. As such, individuals are viewed as playing characters and orchestrating their gestures in accordance with a script on stage in front of an audience of others who judge and evaluate their performance. As is examined below, each element of this portrayal of dramatic roles – individual actors assuming a character, orchestrating their gestures in a performance, following a script, acting on a stage, and playing for an audience – has been a point of debate among social scientists. Stated more positively, each of these elements has been the subject of considerable conceptual elaboration and empirical research, thereby refining the concept well beyond its more literary and dramatic connotations.

What is the nature of individuals who play roles? Several intellectual traditions – utilitarianism, BEHAVIOURISM, pragmatism, interactionism and PHENOMENOLOGY – have all influenced the conceptualization of those behavioural capacities of individuals that are crucial to playing roles. The composite portrayal that emerges produces an image of individuals as (1) possessing calculative, deliberative, and manipulative capacities; (2) seeking rewards and avoiding costs; (3) attempting to adjust and adapt to situations; (4) using implicit stocks of information about people and situations to do so; and (5) maintaining a conception of themselves as certain kinds of individuals. This imagery appears in all role theory and research, although some elements are more emphasized than others by varying researchers (J. H. Turner, 1991).

What is the nature of the characters that individuals assume? This question gets at the issue of what force or forces constrain individuals to act in certain ways. For some (Parsons, 1951; Linton, 1936, p. 28), the individual is seen as behaving in ways appropriate to incumbency in a status position in a system of interconnected positions comprising a social structure – worker, father, teacher, student, and so on. For others, individuals are viewed as behaving in ways, even when incumbent in a clear status position, to gain rewards, avoid costs and sustain self; and hence individuals are conceptualized as actively creating a character rather than just assuming one that is assigned by virtue of occupying a position (R. H. Turner, 1974 and 1962; Strauss, 1978). Because role is typically considered the point of interface between the individual person and the larger social structure, the stance taken on this issue implies very different views on humans and society (Handel, 1979). If role is behaviour

associated with, and dictated by, incumbency in the positions of social structure, then humans are less spontaneous and creative, while the power of social structure is pre-eminent. In contrast, if role is behaviour emitted in negotiation with self, others' idiosyncratic needs or utilities, and positional prescriptions, then individuals are more ontologically significant than social structure.

What are the dynamics of gesturing? It was American pragmatist philosophers who made the initial breakthroughs on this topic. In particular, George Herbert Mead (1934) recognized that gestures mark people's dispositions, feelings and likely courses of action. For Mead, then, a role is a sequence of gestures denoting and highlighting an individual's dispositions and actions. Mead introduced the concept of role-taking to emphasize that as humans read each other's gestures, they take on each other's orienting perspective and, as a result, are better able to predict each other's actions. The phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1932) made similar observations about humans' mutual reading of significant signs or gestures to achieve a sense of intersubjectivity. But, as all these early twentieth-century figures recognized, an individual reacts and interprets another's gestures through the prism of its own self, needs and stocks of accumulated knowledge. As a consequence, role-taking is always somewhat reflexive.

Not only do individuals role-take, but in Ralph H. Turner's (1962) terms, they role-make. That is, they orchestrate gestures in order to assert a role in a situation that meets their needs and affirms their self-conception. This process occurs even in highly structured situations where individuals in status positions will attempt to make for themselves a particular kind of role – good student, sensitive mother, hard worker and so on. Such capacity for role-making assumes that individuals – both those role-making and role-taking – have inventories of role conceptions in their stocks of knowledge. That is, individuals possess conceptions of syndromes of gestures marking certain kinds of roles; and individuals in INTERACTION reciprocally seek to find the underlying role denoted by another's gestures. There is some disagreement, however, over whether the roles in these inventories involve understandings of fine-tuned sequences of gestures or more loosely structured gestalts of gestures denoting more general and vague meanings that must be finalized during the course of role-making (see J. H. Turner, 1988; R. H. Turner, 1962).

What is the nature of the script guiding role behaviour? Some scholars (Parsons, 1951; Linton, 1936) argue that there are norms (expectations of appropriate behaviour) attached to each status position in a social structure; and so, roles are simply the behaviour of people in particular positions following a normative script. Others (R. H. Turner, 1962; Turner and Colomy, 1987; Handel, 1979) would not dispute that there are norms guiding behaviour, but would contend that norms are only broad parameters within which individuals make roles confirming self and meeting their needs. And, if there is a script to the interaction, it is more likely to be the inventories of roles that individuals carry and use in role-making and role-taking. Still others (Blumer, 1969) would go even further and view norms as one of many objects in a situation that individuals may, or may not, take account of when mapping out a line of conduct.

One of Erving Goffman's (1974) last important theoretical ideas was the notion of frames, which are cognitive enclosures (much like the physical material around a picture) that individuals use to delimit the range and type of responses in their roles. Interaction involves, Goffman argued, the keying and rekeying (that is, framing and then reframing) of an interaction, shifting the roles to be played as the frame is changed. For example, when a conversation shifts from polite talk to more personal intimacy, there has been a shift of frames which, in turn, rewrites the script for each actor in their role-playing. Others have extended Goffman's ideas in ways that posit certain basic types of frames and keying processes (J. H. Turner, 1988).

What is the nature of the stage? Beginning with Emile Durkheim's (1912) early twentieth-century discussion of religious ritual, several thinkers have extended the analysis of how co-presence, *per se*, influences the course of normal interaction. Erving Goffman (1967, 1959) was the first to recognize that the distribution of actors in space, their positioning, their movements on social stages, and their use of physical props determine what roles people play and how they want to present themselves to others. More recently, Randall Collins (1988, pp. 223–6, and 1975) has borrowed from both Durkheim (1912) and Goffman (1959) to emphasize that ritual behaviour in normal interaction settings is influenced primarily by the density of individuals co-present on stage and by patterns of inequality in their respective resources (for example, the greater the density and inequality among individuals, the

more everyday rituals are formal, explicit, stereotyped and short term).

What is the nature of the audience? Obviously, the individuals co-present in a situation are an audience; and depending on staging requirements, they influence role behaviour – role-taking, role-making, framing, ritual and awareness of norms. However, in a vein converging with Durkheim's (1893) analysis of the collective conscience, George Herbert Mead (1934) argued that individuals not only role-take with others who are present in a situation but also with others who are not present and, moreover, with communities of attitudes or generalized others. These specific others who are not physically co-present and these generalized others who personify the perspectives appropriate to a situation constitute an important part of the audience for individuals' self-evaluations and role-playing on stage. These ideas fostered a large research tradition on reference groups, which are those varying types of groupings that individuals employ as a frame of reference for self-evaluation and for mapping out courses of action (Hyman and Singer, 1968).

Thus social scientific work on roles has followed the analogy to drama and the theatre – perhaps more than is often recognized. In addition to this work on normal role processes, a large theoretical research tradition examines problematic and deviant role processes. Early work (Goode, 1960; Merton, 1957) focused on problematic situations, particularly those involving role strain (difficulties in meeting the expectations in the script for a role) and role conflict (incompatible demands among the various roles that individuals play). Another large research tradition has focused on deviant roles (crime, mental illness and sexual behaviours, for example) that violate general institutional norms about appropriate behaviour. Some research in this area emphasizes structural and cultural forces that push individuals into deviant roles (Merton, 1938; Quinney, 1979), whereas other work examines how micro interactions can label and channel people into deviant roles (Lemert, 1951; Goffman, 1961; Scheff, 1966).

In sum, then, the concept of role is one of the most central constructs in modern social science. It is viewed as the point where more inclusive social structures impinge on individuals, and reciprocally, as a central force in constructing behaviours that produce, reproduce, or change social structures. Work on role processes cuts across all the social sciences, although it is most prominent in sociological and social psychological work. While the lay connotations of a concept still influence how roles are conceptualized and researched in social science, the concept has been extended considerably beyond its original literary and dramatic usages.

See also SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM.

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