

Introduction: From Social Relationships to Nations

By Jim Myers

The purpose of this module is to introduce you to terms that will guide you as you develop the skills required to work with ancient and modern sources of information. Keep this module handy as we explore the documents that have played major roles in the creation of societies, kingdoms, empires, and nations.

1. Vocabulary

Humans are social creatures:

1. Our survival depends on others.
2. We learn how to survive through watching others.
3. We develop our individual qualities largely through socialization with others.
4. Take away our social life and there is nothing left that we might call human.

Social creatures form social organizations.

1. relationships (John and Joan, father and son, storekeeper and wholesaler)
2. groups (families, friendships, teams)
3. formal organizations (businesses, churches, schools)
4. communities (cities, towns, neighborhoods, and highly independent groups)
5. society (the largest social organization in which people exist on a regular basis)

Humans are not only social: they are cultural.

1. Culture is defined here as ideas, values, and rules that are socially created and understood.

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2. Culture is abstract. It is what we take from the ideas, values, and rules of our organizations.
3. Instead of physically responding to our environment, we bring inside of our heads a socially constructed culture, a perspective, which influences our actions.
4. Because of this cultural quality, organizations will differ considerably, and each one will have different views from other organizations.
5. Each organization becomes a consensus, a general agreement about reality to some extent.
6. Culture guides what is right and wrong and what our customs, traditions, laws, and values should be.
7. Culture is important for both the organization and the guidance of the individual. We end up seeing and understanding the world and ourselves through the filter of culture.

2. Critical Periods & Interactions

We are born into a matrix in interactions. We began life outside the womb the moment the umbilical is cut -- *genetically hardwired systems boot up*. A period known as “the **critical period**,” is a time during early postnatal life when the development and maturation of functional properties of the brain, its ‘plasticity’, is **strongly dependent on experience or environmental influences**. Each neural system has a different critical period, or window of time, during which it was especially plastic and sensitive to the environment, and during which it had rapid, formative growth.¹

At twenty-six months, a child’s plastic change is at its height: new brain systems are forming and strengthening neural connections, and maps are differentiating and completing their basic structure with the help of stimulation from and interaction with the world. The right hemisphere has just completed a growth spurt, and the left hemisphere is beginning a spurt on its own. Language development has a critical period that begins in infancy and ends between eight years and puberty. The human brain reaches maturity at age twenty-five.

¹ *The Brain that Changes Itself*, p. 52.

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We arrive not knowing who we are, but with the genetically hardwired critical periods of the brain functioning. We are placed in a family of a few individuals, but as we mature we find ourselves in many groups and organizations — *families, friends, neighborhoods, schools, siblings, churches, towns or cities, societies, the world*. We watch, we experience, we learn; we take on feelings and words; we make decisions and choices. In a sense, we live in a stream of action, always acting, developing in one direction, then another. Along this stream other people enter and they influence our direction — *what we do, what we think, and what we think we are*.

Interactions are the building blocks of a society. At the heart of any social organization is social interaction, or people acting back and forth with one another in mind: *cooperating, communicating, sharing, arguing, negotiating, compromising, influencing, competing, trading, and understanding one another*. People must interact for society to begin and for it to continue. **Where social interaction ends, society ends. Where it eventually divides a society, two or more societies are created.**

Over time we see ourselves and we know our names and we eventually become these names. Sociologists call these names **identities**. *The word society tells us that we are a social entity, an organized whole, tied to working and playing with other people*. Each society has its own people, history, culture, social structure, language, and institutions.

3. Social Organizations and Nations

A society is not the same as a nation. A nation is a political system that includes government, law, an army, and **physical boundaries**.

Social organizations also have boundaries, but they are abstract and only exist in human brains. They are called **complex belief structures**. Identities are linked to these boundaries.

4. Religions and Science

Religions are social organizations that usually make several assumptions about the universe.

1. Most assume that a God exist.
2. They assume that a body of truth has been given to humankind by that God, which includes a set of moral laws to live by.

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3. Most of religions assume that people's souls live after death.

Science also makes assumptions about the universe.

1. The first is that nature is lawful. This means that **nature is governed by predictable regularities**. Scientists believe that it is possible to explain the past and, on that basis, predict the future because events happen according to natural law. It is **regularity** that governs nature rather than haphazard, unpredictable chaos.
2. The second is that natural events are caused by other natural events. **We can therefore generalize about events in nature rather than simply believe that each event is unique**. We can generalize about illness, gravity, or the composition of matter, energy, plants, and all living things because we assume that each is understandable and, to some extent, predictable. **The purpose of science is to understand these natural laws. Scientists are driven to solve the puzzles that are assumed to exist in nature.**

As I said at the beginning, we will be referring to this module many times in the future. Some people print these and place them in notebooks, while others save them in digital formats.

These models are also guides for conversations and explorations for you to use. As I said above, **interaction is the building block of society**. The Biblical Heritage Center, Inc. Lives 1st Education Network provides these modules to people who want to create new, or replace damaged, building blocks in their social organizations.

Primary Source: *Ten Questions: A Sociological Perspective* by Joel M. Charon (2013); pp. 17-46.

This module is online at -- <https://www.biblicalheritage.org/wisdom.html>



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